

what to add to this our success and gave the command "Forward!".

The third German trench turned out to be farther than I expected, and, having gone another kilometer, we met a relatively rare and some kind of discordant

fire. The terrain here was also uneven, hummocky, in some places overgrown with low shrubs, which allowed us to move forward in short dashes to the line of attack, which I assigned to the line of a separate small tree. When we soon succeeded in

concentrating without losses on the line of attack, the Germans, probably having lost sight of us, disguised behind bushes and hummocks, practically stopped firing. Or maybe they were preparing to repel our supposed attack and were waiting for the moment when we would rise to our full height. And suddenly, behind our

backs (unfortunately, as it is not often in war, this happy "suddenly" turns out to be!) several aircraft buzzed. Our attack aircraft flew again - "Ilys". I instantly came up with the idea of target designation, which we were persistently taught in a military school. And since now I kept the rocket launcher loaded all the time, and my orderly had a bag with rockets next to me, without wasting a second, I fired several rockets in the direction of the Germans. The pilots, well done, understood the signal correctly, and immediately the rockets seemed to stick into the German positions and exploded there. Moreover, in addition to this, our aviators treated the Fritz with good portions of bursts from heavy machine guns. This was a convenient moment to raise the very few remnants of the company

into the attack, while the Nazis had not yet managed to recover from the raid of our Red Star Falcons. And we quickly overcame these 50-60 meters to the German position, bombarded the trenches with grenades and burst into them, finishing off the rest. My machine had to "work" here too. Hand-to-hand combat did not

actually work out here, since they finished off the almost unresisting Fritz, who were taken by surprise and even abandoned their weapons. There was no pity. The justification of our cruelty was confirmed more than once in further battles. Particularly costly was our pity for the unfinished Fritz during the crossing of the Oder and the capture of a bridgehead on its western bank. But more on that below.

Jumping into a German trench, I ordered the captured trench to be urgently prepared to repulse possible counterattacks. And only now I saw that after us two penal signalmen were pulling a telephone line. In my heart I warmly thanked the head of communications of the battalion, senior lieutenant Pavel Zorin, and, of course, the clever Valery Semykin, without whom not a single good deed in the field of communications, probably, was done in our battalion. Soon I was

already reporting to the deputy battalion commander, lieutenant colonel Alexei Filatov (we had two deputy battalion commanders, both lieutenant colonels and both Filatovs, only one Alexei, the other Mikhail). He told me where I was and in what composition. In addition to several machine guns, I had two heavy machine guns, one anti-tank rifle, and two light machine guns. There were almost no cartridges left. Just in case, they picked up German "Schmeissers" (machine guns) with equipped magazines and two "MG" machine guns. They counted the grenades - also not a lot: two anti-tank ones, and 10 pieces of hand ones. It will be difficult if the German

again climbs into a counterattack. Filatov told me that we, it turns out, had already occupied the trenches of the 2nd echelon of the enemy battalion defense area, and congratulated us on such success. I was glad that reinforcements would arrive soon, but you need to hold out for 2-3 hours.

He also reported other good news: our company commander, Captain Matvienko, did not die, as we thought, but was only shell-shocked and slightly wounded, did not want to be evacuated anywhere and is in the battalion infirmary. But I was ordered to remain in the position of a company commander, since Matvienko is being promoted to the post of deputy battalion commander instead of Mikhail Filatov, who is leaving for a higher position in the troops. And I am officially appointed to the position of commander, now not of a rifle, but of an automatic company. (Subsequently, it became known as a company of submachine gunners.)

We had barely had time to talk when the observers reported that two tanks were moving in our direction from the enemy's side and behind them - lines of infantry. Oh, how we can use two anti-tank grenades if we can use them effectively! And it's good that there are no more tanks than grenades. We now occupied a very small

section of the trench. Somewhere in the distance to the left there was a battle, probably a neighbor was also advancing or firing back.

But there was no communication or contact with him. On the right, the flank was generally open. Always open flanks of any scale were considered very dangerous, and even more so in this situation. The main thing now was not to let the enemy bypass us. Noticing a group up to a platoon of fascists with two tanks, everyone, even without any commands, understood what was ahead of us: after all, almost all of our penal fighters, former officers, and now privates, had combat command experience.

He ordered to bring both anti-tank grenades to me, and left a more or less strong, tall penal in the role of a grenade launcher near him. And the calculation of the PTR was headed by the same "Buslaev", who, in the battle on the left flank, like a cudgel, clobbered the Germans with his "gun". The rest of the fighters from the PTR platoon of Pyotr Smirnov, like himself, remained at the place where the Germans so unusually accurately hit our attackers from some new weapon that was still unknown to me. Yes, and junior lieutenant Karasev, apparently, remained there.

Fortunately, as it turned out later, these officers of ours did not die, but were only wounded and soon, after a month or two, returned to the battalion. Despite

on tense dangerous In the situation that is now taking shape in our country, thoughts feverishly searched for the causes of the colossal losses there, in front of the first German trench. And more and more the assumption slipped through them that this terrible picture was already very similar to ordinary explosions in a minefield. The impression of his own sad experience was still fresh. I drove these thoughts as the most incredible: after all, the sappers said that there were no mines at all ... So, until

the end of the war, I was tormented by doubts, was it my fault? And six months later, the battalion commander (already a colonel by that time) Baturin, at a battalion celebration near Berlin on May 9, 1945, in honor of the long-awaited Victory, revealed this secret to me. He told me "in confidence" that then, on the orders of General Batov (and I thought, not without reason, that it was certainly with his, Baturin's, consent) our company was deliberately, deliberately allowed into the minefield. The "justification" of this battalion commander considered that it was "sown" by the Germans with mines with "non-removable" fuses. Didn't really believe it. General Batov admitted in his memoirs that his troops were carrying there

big losses. Here, probably, in order to increase them less, Pavel Ivanovich made such a decision.

And our Baturin, apparently, wanted to receive at least the first order for the war, albeit in such a simple way. Of course, such a decision was not made out of inexperience or stupidity (I don't believe in the stupidity of people who have reached a certain position, but rather, I believe in their dishonesty and meanness). It just happened that the task of clearing mines and ensuring the offensive of Batov's army troops was solved in this way: to put penalized men on mines, despite the fact that officer cadres valuable to the front would die, who tomorrow could strengthen units and subunits of the same 65th with their combat experience Army. Probably, unlike Rokossovsky and Gorbатов, who treated

officers with care who fell under the harsh hand of military tribunals, Pavel Ivanovich Batov was from a different circle of commanders. After the war, I read a lot about this general and will return to his characterization. And then these thoughts only distracted me from organizing the reflection of the enemy's counterattack.

When it became clear that one tank was moving straight in my direction, and the other a little to the left,

I kept one grenade for myself, and on the other I sent a grenade launcher to my left flank. Not far from me was a rather deep passage in the direction of the Germans. I gave the order to the

calculation of the armor-piercers to keep an eye on both tanks and, if one of us manages to knock out the tank, then fire on it, finish it off with the anti-tank rifle, not losing sight of the other

tank.

Apparently, according to the pattern of German tactics, about 50-60 meters short of us, the infantry escorting the tanks broke out in front of them and then Sergeyev's machine guns were the first to speak. Yes, and the machine gunners began to mow down the counterattacks with short aimed bursts. The infantry lay down, and the tanks, adding speed, went to the trenches.

The course of communication, according to which I advanced 15-20 meters ahead and hid there, turned out to be in a very advantageous position: on the side, 10 meters away from the approaching armored monster.

Probably, having noticed our soldiers in the trench, the tank slowed down, turned the gun to the left and began to "probe" the trench, with each

sending the projectile to the right with a shot, getting closer and closer to the communication channel in which, having taken a convenient position, I hid. This is where I managed to accurately throw a grenade right at the caterpillar. The driver of the tank probably felt that his car was drifting to the right, and on the remnants of the damaged caterpillar he sharply tried to turn the tank to the left. And again I was lucky, as I often was lucky in the war. The tank put the starboard side and stern under the sight of our armor-piercers. They were not slow to send several armor-piercing and incendiary bullets into this "panther", and it caught fire! The crew of

the tank, having opened the hatches, began to get out of there, but struck down by a lead swarm, in which there were bullets from my machine gun, the German tankers hung in the hatches, not having time to get out, and clogged them with themselves. Those remaining in the tank tried to use the lower hatches, but the same fate awaited them there. Approximately the same fate went to the second armored monster. And I was glad that my grenade launcher, and armor-piercers for knocked out tanks, would be awarded the Order of the Patriotic War and fully rehabilitated, even if they were not wounded.

And then, like lightning, the thought flashed that I, too, had knocked out a tank and I was also entitled to such an order! So the end will come to my secret shame in front of people close to me for a photograph with someone else's order. Meanwhile, the

surviving Fritz (and there are not many of them left) crawling, not rising, retreated back. I ordered not to shoot again unnecessarily, to save cartridges in case the Fritz climbed again. Let them crawl. The meaning of this my order "do not shoot", apparently, did

not immediately reach the executors. In the heat of battle, for some time short bursts caught up with the fleeing Germans, and they, as if nailed to the ground by these bursts, remained motionless to lie. Communication was still working, and, having reached the phone, I

reported on the repulsed counterattack and two burning tanks. In response, I received encouraging news from Chief of Staff Kiselyov that the necessary units had already been sent to support us. But will they have time if the Nazis launch another counterattack?

He summoned a grenade launcher and both armor-piercers, fortunately not even wounded, wrote a combat report about what had happened and about their

feat and decided to send the heroes to the headquarters of the battalion, as those who deserved awards and redeemed their guilt with courage in a fair fight. And he was pleasantly surprised that all three refused to leave the battlefield. And the Petroleum giant even said with

some resentment: "And to whom will I

leave my gun? .." When reinforcements approached, or rather, a change came to us in this position, general joy overwhelmed everyone. After all, there were very few who had not yet shed blood, and, really, all of them were worthy, as my officers and I thought, not only full rehabilitation for their stamina and courage shown in battles, but also awards.

Together with the unit replacing us, Lieutenant Mirny arrived to us, who participated with us in the battles on the left flank of the bridgehead and for whom we all had a feeling of respect, as a guy not a cowardly dozen. He saw his political work primarily in a personal example in battle, and not in idle talk outside of a combat situation.

However, even here our general joy turned out to be premature. The mood of the political instructor was depressed. He understood that he brought bad news, passing on the written order of the battalion commander Baturin that we should give up the positions we had won to the rifle battalion that replaced us, and ourselves move to the right flank of this battalion and take up defense there. We were not taken out of the battle again.

Yes, of course, it will certainly be easier for a battalion of more than 200 people to defend a sector that was captured by only less than 20 penal battalion fighters, and even an enemy counterattack of superior enemy forces with tanks was repulsed here. It was a shame to give away what was won with such a lot of blood, such sacrifices ...

But an order is an order. The major, the commander of the battalion that replaced us, pointed out to me on the map and showed me the area on the ground that we were supposed to occupy. And in his tone, in his attitude towards us, I felt not only something like remorse for someone's guilt before us, but also respect for us and our military operations.

From his words, I understood that the defense would be long. It was then that it became clear to me, and the penitentiaries understood this, that our Commander General Batov would not let out a single penitentiary from here who would not atone for his guilt with blood or life. And in defense we had to

stand there for more than a month, receive new reinforcements there, lose our comrades-in-arms, including those whom we considered deserving of release. But we thought so, but both Baturin and Batov, as it turned out, had a different opinion.

Soon, already in the new sector of defense, the platoon commander Fedya Usmanov brought me a piece of paper on which were the following verses:

Batov and Baturin, the battalion
commander, took us to Narev.
Well, this is not
Gorbatov, he did not spare the
fighters of the penal battalion. For
him, the penalty box is a
footcloth. He only freed those who
were wounded, who died under

the tank, and drove the rest to death !! After the war, the authors of some publications sought to show that the penal battalions were doomed to be suicide bombers in advance, that the penal battalions, like the army penal companies, were units doomed to death. Yes, for all the time that I had a chance to live in a penal battalion, this Narew period was almost the only one that could confirm these judgments. And the penalty boxers themselves had the right to think the same way. It is not for me to judge the

military leadership and other talents of the general
Batov, therefore, I will cite the judgments of major military authorities.

In the book already mentioned by me, Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky writes that in December 1943, P.I. we warned him about this (highlighted by me. - A.P.) The commander caught himself when the Nazis crushed part of the right flank and began to go to the rear of the main group of army troops ... The commander's enthusiasm for the easy advance of troops without sufficient intelligence and ignoring the warnings of the front headquarters (highlighted by me. - A.P.) about the impending

danger was costly: we lost a significant territory in a direction that is very important for us ... "As one might assume, there were many unjustified human losses there.

Here is what Marshal of Victory G.K. Zhukov wrote in his book "Memoirs and Reflections": "If intelligence failed to give the correct information or if errors were made in their analysis, then the decisions of all command and staff instances will inevitably go in the wrong direction."

Another great quote that I will remind the reader. These opinions of the most authoritative commander of the Great Patriotic War, Marshal Rokossovsky, at least partially reveal the complex nature of the commander. Recalling the actions of the Batov army in the offensive operation "Bagration" in August 1944, in the same book, the marshal wrote: The 65th

Army, not meeting much resistance from the enemy in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, pulled ahead and then got into an unpleasant story. Without securing the flanks, the army was attacked from two sides by units of two German tank divisions. They crashed into the center of the army, divided its troops into several groups, depriving the Commander for some time of communication with and control of most of the formations (emphasis mine.

A.P.). The front command sent a rifle corps and a tank brigade to the rescue. The position has been restored. But Pavel Ivanovich had to endure difficult moments. And here is what

Marshal of the Engineering Troops V. K. Kharchenko said about this case in his book "... for special purposes": On the

morning of July 23, units of the SS Panzer Division "Viking" ... managed to connect with the 4th Nazi Panzer Division .. Several divisions of the 65th Army found themselves in a difficult situation... Soon the Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief... G. K. Zhukov and the Front Commander... K. K. Rokossovsky arrived at Batov to organize a retaliatory strike. Reserves were urgently raised. By the end of July 24, the Nazis were defeated and the situation restored.

I am probably somewhat biased in choosing quotes from the book of Marshal Rokossovsky. The positive qualities of Commander-65 are also noted many times there. But Batov's weak points are so noticeably emphasized: the lack of proper intelligence, insufficient attention to the flanks and some self-confidence, leading to large, and most often unjustified, losses.

It's even somehow strange: after all, the combat experience of the general, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, is huge. He fought in Spain, participated in the Finnish war. But no less strange is the fact that Pavel Ivanovich went through the entire Patriotic War as the commander of the same army and was never promoted. It means something? And the army did not become either guards or shock ...

And here is a quote from the book of General Batov himself ("In battles and campaigns", pp. 453-454) about the

events at the Narevsky bridgehead: October 4 ... the enemy suddenly went on the offensive ... Why did the Germans succeed in surprise? An enemy tank grouping consisting of three divisions struck from the depths ... There was a miscalculation of our reconnaissance. German tanks entered our mined areas on a wide front. But ... not one was blown up. It turns out that enemy sappers cleared the mines. And intelligence did not find this ... (highlighted by me. -

A.P.). This is once again on the same rake? How many people died due to intelligence miscalculations, who counted it ?!

Well, the words quoted above in the quote from Batov's book that the Germans were able to defuse the mines make me think again: why did the sappers of Batov's army fail to defuse the mines in our offensive sector? And not anti-tank, but anti-personnel? Or was this idea prompted by our new battalion commander Baturin, who first appeared near the combat situation? Or maybe the death of some hundreds

of penalized soldiers is a trifle compared to the victims of poor intelligence of the 65th Army?

I again wanted to turn to the memoirs of Alexander Vasilievich Gorbатов, where he tells how, in Operation Bagration, on the night before the offensive, "under the noise and roar of the bombing, our workers - sappers made hundreds of passes in minefields and wire obstacles for infantry ... working in close proximity to the enemy, often under machine-gun and gunfire." Well, if in our case the mines were really non-

recoverable, then why not launch minesweepers directly at them during the artillery preparation, which would cope with these passages in a matter of minutes?

As it seemed to me then, an officer of just a company scale, and as it seems now, many years later, such a simple solution could have occurred to both the battalion commander, and even more so to the commander. But for some reason it didn't come...

Probably deservedly, neither Baturin nor Batov were honored to have the penalty box call them "dad", like Osipova, although the names of both began with the syllable "bat", consonant with this warm word "dad". Here is another document. I

have in my hands a large article by the famous journalist Eduard Polyanovsky "Soldier of Victory Zhukov", published on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Victory on April 11, 1995 in Izvestia. It is not about a world-famous marshal, but about an unknown soldier with the same surname. The name of Pavel Ivanovich Batov is also mentioned in this article. And in connection with this.

In 1946, a certain Colonel Zhitnik, chief of staff of a formation subordinate to P.I. Batov, with whom Zhitnik had known personally for a long time, draws up "supporting documents" for the export of an unreasonably large number of personal belongings from Germany and certifies them with the seal and signature of "General -Major Zhitnik", i.e. his last name, but with a fake title. The border guards expose the imaginary general, and the case is transferred to the prosecutor's office. It smelled like a tribunal.

Saves the rogue Batov. Here is his resolution: "Leave Colonel Zhitnik in the ranks of the Red Army. Send him to the Voroshilov Academy in the first place." Wow! Instead of a tribunal - to the most prestigious academy! Such care to save the penalty box - officers and their soldiers in battle! How many lives would have been saved then! In December 1952, the Commander of the Belarusian

Military District, Marshal of the Soviet Union S. K. Timoshenko, gives this protege of Batov a murderous description: "Behaves like an operetta artist. Very frivolous and arrogant. Insolent liar.

Colonel

Zhitnik was dismissed for discrediting the rank of officer. Then General Batov had already retired from leadership positions in the Armed Forces and was unable to resist Marshal Timoshenko. Pavel Ivanovich by this time headed the Soviet

War Veterans Committee. And more than once in scandalous situations, reserve officer Zhitnik resorted to the help of a trouble-free general, Polyanovsky writes further.

Well, why does a high-ranking general favor this unworthy officer so much? Why do crooks (this is how the author of the article characterizes Zhitnik) find support from some high officials? What qualities bring them together?

These are the facts that disturbed and still disturb not only, I think, me. But all this became known to me much later than those difficult days and nights on the Narevsky bridgehead.

And then it was not up to assessing the actions of senior commanders. During the war, neither the soldier nor the officer has the right to doubt the actions of the commanders, to a kind of opposition. Any opposition at this time can be regarded as a crime, as treason. Examples of such an assessment of the actions of their former superiors by some penalized were in our battalion. And there was no justification for such facts then. That's why I kept my thoughts like that to myself. Therefore, he advised Fedya Usmanov not to talk about those poems that one of the penalists wrote about Baturin and Batov and not to look for their author.

In those troubled days of October 1944, it was necessary to focus primarily on the reconstruction of the German trenches, adapting them for reliable defense in the opposite direction, that is, against the Germans. And this includes the transfer of parapets, and the alteration of machine-gun nests, niches for grenades and ammunition, and the creation of new communication passages, and much more. In general, work - no end. Soon a telephone

connection was extended to us. This was again taken care of by Senior Lieutenant Valery Semykin, who again voluntarily remained with us in the trenches. After all, according to his position, he could have been at the headquarters most of the time, and he was eager to join us in the trenches!

I will dwell on one more detail. In each course of communications, 20-30 meters from the main trench, the simplest, not very deep pits were torn off (at least one per squad) for the administration of natural needs. As they filled up, they were covered with earth and new ones came off instead of them.

The end of October was already approaching, the nights became cold, even sometimes frosty, in the mornings a silver hoarfrost kept on the already dried grass and ground for a long time. On our site turned out to be a simple, shallow dugout with a slight overlap. It was discovered by my orderly, and I placed myself in it with him and my company clerk. By the way, this was not a penal, but a regular soldier named Mamkin, who had a calligraphic handwriting and the ability to spontaneously compose either amusing or scary stories. He did not go on the attack, he remained with company documents. Then he dragged one of his former castle platoon commanders, with whom he became especially friendly, here. As they say, "in tight quarters, but not offended." For my deputy Zhora Sergeev, the soldiers dug up another shelter, since the company commander and his deputy had to be placed at a distance so as not to die at the same

time. My company was now smaller in number than a platoon, and in platoons - 8-10 people each, and the area that was allocated to us for defense seemed prohibitively large. But soon replenishment began to arrive. A day or two later, 10 new people were brought to us. It seemed not bad for organizing a more reliable defense, but it was frustrating that this replenishment included one armor-piercer, whom I presented for early release and a reward for knocked out tanks. It was our new battalion commander who showed "vigilance". He and the special officer meticulously tried to find out who fired at the tanks, and who only loaded the anti-tank rifle magazine. And having decided that only one could knock out a tank, they considered my presentation of the other for a reward and release unreasonable. It was a shame for the penalty box, but for me too. I felt ashamed both for the fact that I so encouraged the diligent man and the brave warrior, and for the fact that the battalion commander did not take into account my opinion, the opinion of the company commander who led the battle and directly participated in the clash with the enemy. So the beginning of my

"interaction" with the new battalion commander did not bode well ... The active part of the hostilities to restore the lost positions on the bridgehead was over. As General Batov noted in his memoirs, "the bridgehead almost doubled. The troops completed their tasks ... Preparations began for a new o

And we began defensive everyday life, completely unlike the defense in Belarus.

Valera Semykin brought us a new table of call signs for telephone conversations, where instead of the usual number I was given the call sign "Alexander Nevsky", Zhora - "Georgy Saakadze", Fedya Usmanov - "Salavat Yulaev". Unusually, but, as they say, "little things, but nice." About

what happened to us and to me personally here on the defensive on the Narew bridgehead, I will tell in the next chapter.

CHAPTER

7 Narew Defense. Disobedience and tactical differences. order hierarchy. Front style. New total enemy. Death of Smertin's Bone. The helmet saga. Light and warmth. "Penalty".

Two days of vacation. Meeting

with Rita About what happened next, in our section of the defense of the Narevsky bridgehead, I will try to tell more briefly, mainly because the Germans here were somewhat more restrained in their combat activity. The front command pulled up the rear areas that had been stretched out over the period of the Bagration operation, put the troops in order, which had become thinner by that time, restored the resource of military equipment and accumulated all types of ammunition, preparing for a further large-scale offensive, for one of the most important strategic operations, which later received the name " Vistula of the Oder". So we went on

the defensive. As the reader remembers, in my company after the second offensive, during which combat losses amounted to more than 80%, there were fewer platoons. This is even taking into account the replenishment that has already arrived. And in these first days of organizing the defense of my company sector, the battalion commander called me to the phone. In a tone that did not allow for objections, he ordered me to organize a ROP (company strong point). For me, this order of his was so unexpected, so absurd, that for a while I was simply taken aback. This form of company defense organization would be expedient when there are at least three more or less full-blooded platoons in the company.

In this case, two platoons occupy the defense in the first trench, and the third equips a position in the second echelon, and thus the ROPs

become the basis of a relatively deep-echeloned defense of the entire three-company battalion. And as it turned out,

we didn't have not only a battalion, but even a company! With my small forces, I could not organize a company stronghold without weakening the already weak defense of the front line. I immediately reported this on the phone to Baturin, telling him that I could fulfill his order only on the condition that at least two more full-blooded platoons were subordinated to me or when replenishment arrived in the company sufficient to form two more missing

platoons.

As I expected, the lieutenant colonel burst into sharp, indignant phrases, threatening that he might change his mind and not send to the front headquarters an idea of my appointment to the post of company commander. Realizing that until my appointment was legalized by an order on the Front, the battalion commander could easily cancel it, nevertheless (as they say, I got "the reins down the drain") immediately, without hesitation, asked him to whom and when he would order to surrender command of the company .

After a long and painful silence, Baturin said in a very dissatisfied voice: "For now, give orders! I'll deal with you!" And then, as if the demon had beguiled me again, instead of the statutory "Yes!" blurted out: "Come here, to the trenches, here on the spot and we'll figure it out." Baturin, who had never been in the

trenches, on the front line, boiled over and answered in a voice that was already breaking into a cry: "I myself know where I should be, when and where to come!" This is where our conversation ended. Then my former company commander,

Major Matvienko, who had already become a deputy battalion commander, told me: "Why did you climb on the rampage? Well, I would have said "Yes! ", But I would have done it right!" Well, I didn't have such "ingenuity" either then or after... Our new

(he was still "new", largely unknown, unexplored) battalion commander turned out to be a man, as I soon became convinced, also vindictive. There were circumstances in which I more than once felt Baturin's pronounced disfavor almost until the very end of the war. By the way, the battalion

commander has already been awarded the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, I degree, apparently "for the successful organization of battles"

when restoring the flanks of the bridgehead. Now, already knowing that the same order, but of the third degree, as well as the order of Alexander Nevsky, were in their status a rank lower than that acquired by himself, he ordered the officers who actually provided him with his first order to be awarded with these orders. Philip Kiselev told me about this, and together we began to draw up reports for the awarding of platoon commanders. We presented Zhora Sergeev to the Order of Alexander Nevsky, Fedya Usmanov - to Bogdan Khmel'nitsky III degree. Baturin told me to convey that I would also be introduced to Alexander Nevsky. Here I had to tell Philip about my stupid story with the "twice

order bearer" and ask him to persuade the battalion commander to agree to the Order of the Patriotic War of any degree assigned to me for a wrecked tank.

When Baturin was presented with award lists, he did not agree to put his signature on mine for a long time. It turned out that his subordinate would receive a higher reward than himself. As Philip Kiselev told me later, both Filatov and Matvienko actively and persistently defended my award list. In general, by their combined efforts they all managed to convince the battalion commander to sign the submission. Baturin personally

corrected the "first" degree to the "second", while noting bitterly that "orders are not asked for, they are awarded according to merit." It turned out that I did not win in single combat with a German tank. When they told me how this

conversation took place, I realized that another crooked and rusty nail was driven into our service and personal relations with the battalion commander. But I still received the Order of the Patriotic War II degree. And it was not the battalion commander Baturin who handed it to me, but the chief of

staff, Major Kiselev. Finally, like a mountain from my shoulders, the weight of my "order" shame in front of my relatives, which weighed so heavily on my conscience those long

months. ... Maybe because the supply bases of the front and the army have not yet caught up, or maybe for some other reason, but it has become much worse with food. Soldier's rations, despite the "sedentary" way of life on the defensive, without attacks, exhausting marches, rushes and

crawling, the fighters were not enough, and the front-line manner of sharing bread, sugar, etc. in a special way returned to them. Some of the fighters were trusted to cut bread or divide sugar and something else into approximately equal shares. Then, usually, the squad leader or someone appointed by him turned away, covered his eyes with a hat, and the "bread cutter" or one of the "trusted persons", pointing his finger at one of the portions, asked: "To whom?" And the one who turned away had to name one of the fighters. And there was no resentment, no grumbling, even if it seemed to someone that the neighbor got a larger portion. And since we, the commanders of platoons and companies, in a combat situation ate from a common soldier's boiler, I insisted that this order be strict for us too. There was no way to diversify our trench "menus" here: it was already late autumn and the local population was not observed near our positions.

And then another misfortune happened, to which we could not get used, it was very unpleasant. In connection with the steady cold snap, the soldiers were given hats, overcoats, and we, officers, were given winter uniforms. We were especially pleased with the fur lamb vests. Finally, all underwear was changed. True, they didn't send us bathhouses, as happened in the defense on Belarusian soil, and for how long we all didn't wash,

comfrey.

And either due to the fact that these vests, uniforms and underwear did not undergo proper sanitation before being issued to us, or it was not carried out properly, or because of some things left after the Germans in the dugouts, but soon we were tortured by new enemies are insects. In short - we have covered everything fairly, totally. My requests to organize an alternate washing in the camp baths with an unscheduled change of linen and at least a partial sanitization of uniforms seemed to be heard, but for some reason were not implemented.

Finally, not far from our trenches, in a lowland, they installed an arrived marching death chamber. And again without changing clothes. Alternately putting into it either tunics with trousers (staying in the cold in underwear), then shirts with underpants, the fighters roasted their uniforms. And we, the command staff, handed over our fur vests there, not thinking that from the high temperature in the disinfection chamber

our waistcoats will shrink and warp so much that not only will they no longer be worn, but they will not even be put on. In early December, we were taken out of

the trenches, and we went to the formation, although not very far, but still the rear. And only there, after repeated sanitation, total haircuts and baths in camping and village baths, we finally managed to win this war against parasites. And the decisive contribution to this victory was made by the unquestioned medical authority, our battalion doctor Stepan Petrovich Buzun, who somewhere got hold of the so-called "K" soap, which sometimes destroyed uninvited living creatures along with the top layer of the skin. And soon we were given brand new ones, fragrantly smelling of sheepskin.

fur vests and we were happy again.

While we were in the trenches, we were very worried about the fascist snipers and the frequent attempts of the Fritz to test the reliability of our defense with strong artillery attacks, after which, as a rule, there were attacks by large, sometimes up to a company, groups with tanks.

Here, for the first time, I saw anti-aircraft gunners fighting against tanks, standing in positions directly behind our trenches. Their quick-firing guns met the German tanks with well-aimed direct fire shots, and several vehicles immediately caught fire, while the rest fled. The German attack bogged down before reaching our trenches. Then more than once I had to witness the use of anti-aircraft weapons against ground targets, and this always aroused admiration. Similar German attacks on our defenses were like reconnaissance in force in order to identify our system of firing points, and at the same time capture the "tongue". However, in our section they never

succeeded, although rumors reached us that in some places their attempts were not ineffective.

And even then I thought: it's good that I didn't agree to Baturin's demand to place part of a fairly thinned company in the second echelon when creating a company stronghold (ROP). We gave a reliable rebuff to the Germans with the few firepower that the company had at that time, and the Fritz never managed to get close to us even at the distance of throwing a grenade. It seemed to me that Baturin also understood this, since he did not raise more

question about ROP. I already had two platoons more or less completed, and a new platoon commander from the battalion reserve was assigned to my company from the battalion reserve, Senior Lieutenant Razhev Georgy Vasilievich, a cheerful, sociable person and, as it turned out later, very partial to the female half of humanity, and indeed to alcohol too. And our company became under the command of some senior lieutenants of the "Starley", as the naval penitentiaries said.

Powerful artillery attacks sometimes led to serious losses. People died not only from their negligence or negligence. There were also cases of direct hits of large-caliber shells and mines in trenches and light earthen shelters. There was no forest nearby, and we had nowhere to take logs or boards to build reliable dugouts. In one of these raids, Georgy

Razhev was also seriously shell-shocked. For two weeks he heard almost nothing, but he did not agree to go to the infirmary or the medical battalion. So he commanded! But I

especially remember the death of Kostya Smertin (I don't remember his former officer rank, I only know that he was not a senior officer, but was either a lieutenant or a captain). He was one of the observers in the company. On that day, I was next to him and at the same time also observed with binoculars. I managed to find a well-camouflaged position of a German sniper. And I warned Kostya about this, advising him to be more careful, maybe this sniper is hunting for one of us. My assumption was not long in being confirmed: I

barely had time to sit down when a bullet whistled over my head. I was lucky here, as often it happened to me. But I did not have time to make Smertin sit down: he apparently also wanted to see where the sniper was firing from. And the second bullet hit Kostya right in the middle of the forehead. He somehow slowly sank to the bottom of the trench, as if carefully sitting down, raised his unusually shifty eyes, and his lips began to whisper something incoherent, incomprehensible. His face quickly began to acquire some kind of parchment tint. I had an individual bag with me, and I tried to bandage his seemingly small wound, from which blood was slowly flowing. I immediately remembered how, back in high school, we were taught under the GSO program ("Ready for Sanitary Defense") to put a bandage on our heads, called a "hat

Hippocrates. "But nothing helped. Kostya died. I felt sorry for him somehow especially. Maybe because I did not have time to pull him up in time, or maybe because the last minute of his life ended right in my arms, but I was not given could understand what he wanted to say with the indistinct rustle of his lips, and with his expressive blue eyes.

I remember Kostya's last name, probably because my maternal grandmother's maiden name was also Smertina. When he arrived at the platoon, which was formed even before reaching the Narew, I even asked about his pedigree in order to establish whether we were relatives. But if my grandmother had part of the Khakassian blood, oriental facial features, a characteristic cut of brown eyes and clearly defined cheekbones were noticeably expressed, then this guy was from Yaroslavl and his facial features were completely different, which I gave in my imagination to the ancient Russians.

In connection with this case, I would like to remember something else. In our battalion it was not customary to wear steel helmets. It was considered some kind of chic, or something, to do without them, although they were in the battalion warehouses, and our suppliers offered them to us more than once. I don't know where this disregard for helmets came from, but it was persistent. And we, the officers, with our, as it now seems, unreasonable example, probably also supported this not very correct tradition.

I don't think that in the case of Kostya Smertin, the helmet could save his life, because the bullet hit him just above the bridge of the nose and the helmet would still not have covered this place. But even after this tragedy, no one ever put on helmets... And here

are some more details of front-line trench life. Since winter was coming, and the end of trench life was not yet in sight, we arranged our housing as best we could. They tore off niches under the parapet, but no more than two people, remembering well the tragic incident with Ivan Yanin. By some incredible means, including night raids over the front line to the remains of a barn destroyed by the war, which the Germans kept under constant control and periodically fired at these ruins, the soldiers managed to get either fragments of boards or poles, or even whole slabs. The "building material" mined at great risk even made it possible to build primitive dugouts, like the one in

where I was located with my company control cell. These shelters made it possible, at least for a while, to either hide from wet snow, or simply warm up and even dry a little.

In the wall of the dugout, they made a recess with a hole outward under the chimney and burned everything that could burn in this "stove": wrappers from packs of cartridges, some kind of chips, sticks, straw, shrubs, etc. But at first I was not only surprised, but even frightened - they burned ordinary thick drafts in these most primitive hearths (of course, without fuses!). Tol melted in the fire and burned rather slowly and steamy, giving off a more or less significant amount of heat. But what was scary was that if at least one cartridge, even a pistol cartridge, happened to be on fire, it would play the role of a detonator, and then ... No, it's better not to fantasize further. Therefore, having learned about this method of heating, I ordered the platoon officers to strictly control this heating process. God forbid, if at least one cartridge gets there along with the wrappers from the tarred cartridge packs !!!

Naturally, there were no doors in dugouts, the entrances to them were hung with ordinary soldier raincoats, dense, light-tight, therefore, when the "stove" was not heated, and when it was necessary to write a letter, memorandum, or combat characteristic for a fighter, they used it as old, rays.

By that time, the trophy paraffin bowls that we had in a small amount had long been used up, and the idea of replacing them was suggested to us by Valera Semykin, who handed me a large coil of trophy telephone wire, which had dense rubber insulation and a tarred braid. This wire was hung from the ceiling so that one end was slightly higher than the other, and its upper part was set on fire. The fire, gradually devouring the braid with insulation, moved down the wire. It was only necessary to pull the burnt part of the wire from the coil lying right here in the dugout in time. There was not so much light, but the stench, and especially soot, was more than enough. In the morning, leaving the dugout, we often looked

either like devils from the underworld, or like Negroes we had not yet seen with our own eyes. And it cost a lot of work with snow and soap to tear off this terrible

mask. Well, if a snowball fell, then it, fresh, not yet powdered with gunpowder, was a joy to us. Here, in the trenches of the Narevsky

bridgehead, I met my next birthday - November 18th. I then turned 21 years old. During the war, we grew up so rapidly that it seemed that we had already lived a long, long life and felt far from being young men, which we really were. My new platoon commander, Zhora Razhev, informed me that the penitentiaries had

given me, while still quite young, the most honorable, and not only in my opinion, title of "dad". And some, taking into account my caring attitude towards the penalty box, which both the battalion commander Osipov, and General Gorbатов, and Marshal Rokossovsky brought up in me by their example, called me even warmer - "penalty". I will not hide, this message was very flattering for me. It was only later that I guessed to grow a mustache in order to at least somehow seem older than my own, as one elderly penitentiary told me, "shamelessly young." And coincident with my birthday was the announcement of the establishment

of Artillery Day, which was to continue to be celebrated on November 19 to commemorate the feat of artillerymen in the Battle of Stalingrad. And on this day, although we were on the defensive, for the sake of the holiday they gave us a front-line glass of vodka. So my birthday was celebrated at the same time. And it was joyful that Ivan Matvienko, my former company commander, and Valera Semykin - PNSh-2, and Philip Kiselev - chief of staff, and Alyosha Filatov - deputy came to congratulate me with their People's Commissar's dose. battalion commander.

So, with the participation of my trench friends Zhora Sergeev and Zhora Razhev (we now have two Zhora in the company), and Fedya Usmanov, the company turned out to be very friendly, warm, and simply brotherly at the front. We also commemorated Vanya Yanin, and all those who had already been taken away from us forever by this terrible and long war, the end of which nevertheless dawned somewhere not so far away as a year ago.

Soon a letter was brought to me. "From your wife," said the postman. I realized it was from Rita. Only a few knew that I call my wife my beloved girl, Rita from Leningrad, whom I met and fell desperately in love with a little over a year ago. And since then, our endless "postal romance" has lasted. Again we deceived military censorship, and by initial letters

names of people who allegedly convey happy birthday greetings to me in her letter, I determined that her hospital was recently relocated to the Polish town of Lochow, not very

far away from us.

In the first days of December, we were suddenly removed from the defense, which we hastily handed over to some full-blooded rifle company, and began to prepare for withdrawal to the rear, for reorganization.

It turns out that the Front Commander Marshal Rokossovsky, having learned that the "gang of his name" is still on the front line since October, ordered the release of all penalized prisoners whose terms of stay in the penal battalion had expired, as well as those who deserved early rehabilitation for their courage and stamina. Our joy, especially those who were directly concerned, knew no bounds. The only pity is that Kostya Smertin and many others did not live to see this happy moment. They died here, already on the defensive. We quickly collected our simple belongings and the very next day, having

transferred the defense site to the neighbors, we were with our soldiers at the headquarters of the battalion, located in a house on the edge of an almost completely destroyed small village. With an anxiously beating heart (after all, so much has happened between us over the past month and a half!) I went to report to the battalion commander a drill note on the composition of the company and combat characteristics for those to be rehabilitated. Having seized the right moment, he asked permission to leave for 3-4 days to visit his bride in the hospital (I did not lie to Baturin that Rita was my wife, as I told everyone in the battalion - you never know how he would react to this). For me in the company, I offered to leave the machine gunner commander Georgy Sergeev, who was mine in battles

deputy.

The battalion commander, although not immediately, but named the settlement in which the battalion rear, headquarters and my entire company should be concentrated, and ordered me to be there no later than 2 days later. And temporarily subordinate the company to Senior Lieutenant Usmanov. Of course, he was right, because Sergeev was on the staff of the machine-gun company, not mine. I

was so pleased with the unexpectedly conflict-free resolution of my request for a vacation that, having asked permission to go, I immediately jumped out of it, inspired and happy, with one thought - "to be in time!" and even

I did not realize to be surprised at such an unforeseen vacation I received.

Still would! More than a year has passed since Rita and I parted in Ufa, and now, it seems, our long-awaited meeting may come already at the front, and I will again see her sweet, radiant eyes, bright smile ...

Short instructions to Fedya Usmanov, who understood everything perfectly, and I, grabbing my duffel bag, where my dry ration was, was already rushing to a nearby road, along which cars passed in both directions. Having orientated on the map, I determined that with a successful combination of circumstances, I could get to Lochow on "transfer" rides today. The very first car that stopped turned out to be just a gift of fate, it was driving to the rear area of the front and it was through Lochow. Fatal luck!

A few hours later we drove into this small small town.

I rushed to the first cart that came across, harnessed by some kind of skinny horse, driven by a very young soldier (for some reason, without shoulder straps), and asked him where the hospital was located. I did not cease to wonder all day how lucky I was, but here my surprise knew no bounds. In this soldier, I hardly, but recognized Rita's brother Stasik, who, as it turned out, secretly left with her and with his mother, a doctor, to the front. He, too, seems to have recognized me and answered my question with a question: "Do you need Rita Makarievskaya?" I rushed to him, hugged his frail figure, jumped into the wagon, and he slowly took me to the hospital, although I wanted to jump off and run where he would point me.

Soon we drove up to a group of houses, Stasik ran into one of them, but quickly jumped out and said that Rita had not been released, the head of the hospital was conducting some important classes there, and Rita told us to go to their house. What

kept me from accepting this invitation was the presence of those damned insects, which not only spoiled our already unsweetened life in the trenches, but also put me in a terribly awkward position before a long-awaited and immensely desired meeting. In fact, it was precisely because of this that I did not expect to linger here, although I wanted to see my beloved to the point of madness. And that's probably

this madness and the fact that I had known Rita's mother Ekaterina Nikolaevna for a long time made me immediately decide to honestly confess to her this misfortune of mine, and come what may, but I'll still wait for Rita and even on the street (it was in this day is not very frosty) let's stay together. They came. Ekaterina

Nikolaevna saw us through the window and jumped out, recognizing me. Apparently, I blushed very much from shame at the forthcoming confession, because she immediately anxiously asked what was the matter with me, if I was sick. I had to immediately, without preamble, lay out everything to her and say that I would rather wait for Rita here on the street. However, she, immediately understanding everything and appreciating the importance of the upcoming meeting for us, instantly made a different decision: "Come in, Sasha, do not be shy about this illness, unfortunately, this is not uncommon at the front, many wounded come to us with this. We will now accept necessary measures."

Come in. She immediately made me take off my uniform, go into a small room (probably Stasik), take off my underwear, put on a white medical gown and go to bed, rest until Rita comes. She immediately began to boil my underwear on a hot stove, and carefully ironed my tunic and trousers with a red-hot iron.

I had no idea how our meeting would take place and, despite the almost sleepless night before that (and more than one!), which had gone into writing the combat characteristics of the penalty box, the transfer of the defense area and other matters, nevertheless, from excitement before the main thing in my front-line life meeting and did not fall asleep. A

few hours later, Rita came running. I jumped out of bed in an unusual outfit for myself - in a white doctor's coat, obviously not for my height. Apparently, my mother brought her up to date, and she was not surprised to see me in such an outfit, rushed to me, and we hugged for a long time.

so they stood.

How Rita has changed! Only a little over a year has passed since our parting in Ufa, and she has matured so much! More than once, the washed tunic with epaulettes sat deftly on her good, slightly plump figure after the blockade thinness, instead of a soldier's belt she wore an officer's. The same washed-out skirt, tightly fitting her slender legs.

We rejoiced immensely at this meeting given to us by fate, and while all night the restless Ekaterina Nikolaevna

ironed my clothes, we talked, talked, talked ... We remembered everything that had happened to us this year until today's happy

evening. Yes, we dreamed about this meeting for many days, weeks, months... ...Now that memories of that disturbing and happy time came flooding back while working on this book, it's probably time to tell in more detail about the history of our acquaintance and romantic relationship, ended with a front wedding. To this I will devote the next chapter of my memoirs.

It will not be easy for me to do this, given that on the 40th anniversary of the Victory, in December 1984, the columnist for Komsomolskaya Pravda, Inna Pavlovna Rudenko, published in this newspaper a large, full-page essay, which she called "Military Field Romance". She gave this name to the essay in defiance of the feature film by Pyotr Todorovsky under the same name. And this film, as it was then assessed by front-line soldiers and especially front-line soldiers, seemed to us simply a libel on women who at the front, risking their lives, fought the enemy. And in Todorovsky's film, a woman at the front is not a fighter, but

entertainment for the battalion commander. So, using the example of our front-line fate, Inna Pavlovna tried (and, in my opinion, successfully) to debunk Todorovsky's view of this difficult problem. And in her essay she wrote in detail about my acquaintance with Rita and about the relationship that grew into great love. Love that endured both a long separation and a joint military path in the penal battalion in the last months and miles of that long and difficult war. It's hard for me to get away from the canvas, the tone that the most experienced journalist put into the essay (it's clear: a woman wrote about a woman!). Therefore, I will try not to draw a broad and comprehensive canvas of our "military field" novel, but I will try to confine myself primarily to what was not included

in the essay of Inna Rudenko. I don't know how I can do it, because so much happened then, but the next chapter of my book will be mainly lyrical-romantic. CHAPTER

8 History

of acquaintance with the future wife. Love at first sight. Address in the sand, Ufa. Unexpected opera and ballet impressions.

Front. Postal

novel over a year long. Front-line wedding It all started with the fact that in the reserve regiment stationed in the village of Alkino near Ufa, where I, a young lieutenant, served then, on a warm summer evening, the regimental band played waltzes on the dance floor, and I had no time for dancing. The reason is banal: a young lieutenant in his 19-odd years had two wisdom teeth cut at once. The pain was debilitating, and I wandered behind the fence that hid the dancing, the same young officers, who had only recently changed their buttonholes with head over heels for officer shoulder straps with stars. Basically, their partners were dressed-up girls, workers of a nearby dairy plant. With these "thrushmaids" not only waltzes and tangos were played to their heart's content by officer youth - they managed to "spin" serious romances.

On a bench standing near the fence, I saw a thin blonde crying softly and bitterly, obviously not dressed for a dance evening. Maybe I just felt sorry for her, or maybe I wanted to escape from the annoying toothache, but I went up to her and spoke.

It turned out that Rita (that was the name of the girl) was a Leningrader who, together with her mother and younger brother (her father died of starvation), managed to evacuate from the besieged city to Ufa, where they had many relatives. The city committee of the Komsomol took patronage over the evacuated Petersburgers and, in order to feed the girl, who was emaciated on the blockade rations, appointed her as a pioneer leader in a camp located here, in Alkino, not far from our regiment. Her clothes are some ski pants of an indefinite color, worn out, but a neat blouse on thin shoulders, and, in addition, instead of shoes that would be more suitable for dancing, wooden planks with criss-cross straps nailed to them (such here "clogs" of war time) - well, it didn't fit the situation on the dance floor. So the girl began to cry ... We talked for a long time. And

she calmed down, and my unbearable toothache somehow imperceptibly reduced its violent intensity. I accompanied her to the very pioneer camp, and there some evil, portly aunt of 35-40 years old began to strictly reprimand Rita for leaving her far from angelic habits of the wards unattended. I had to stand up. That's how I met Rita's boss. Maybe this is

helped the poor girl, as this grand lady began to treat her softer.

We agreed with Rita to meet the next day. And after a few days I felt that I could hardly wait for the next meeting. To be honest, I didn't avoid any duty,

outfits, guards before, and even from the monotony of the service I found some special charm in the feeling of my responsibility either for the battalion, or for the guard, or for the catering department. So, now these outfits have become hateful to me, because they did not give me the opportunity to meet daily with this charming girl, with whom it was so interesting. In general, as they say, fell in love "head over heels" from the first

glance.

But one day she did not come at the appointed time to the cherished bench. Frustrated, I nevertheless noticed that nearby, on the sand, with a stick thrown right there, was inscribed ... the address: "Ufa, Tsyurupa street ...". Now it was time to wait. And we in Alkino then used such a "humorous" rhyme: "We have money - we are walking in Ufa, there is no money - we are sitting Chishmy" (Chishmy is the nearest junction station, 5-6 kilometers from us).

Soon managed to escape. Found! He met her mother, aunts (the male part of the relatives was at the front). And on the very first evening (and I had to be back before getting up), Rita suggested going to the theater. That evening they were giving an opera, a stage performance that was still unfamiliar to me. The Leningrad level of culture of my friend - I understood this immediately. The very first opportunity - and immediately to the theater, and even to the opera!

The theatrical world was already a little familiar to me from the Far East, the town of Obluchye, where I studied from the 8th to the 10th grade at the 4th railway school. Before that, of all the arts, I, a boy from a stop-station, knew only silent cinema, in which volunteers from among the spectators constantly had to turn the handle of a dynamo.

So, in this town, the only cultural center was the railway club, which sometimes came with tours from Khabarovsk theater Dorprofsozha (road trade union of railway workers). The city and the junction station Obluchye were one of the

sections of the Far Eastern Railway, so everything that happened there was under the jurisdiction of the railway administration and its trade unions.

This theater came by a special train with concerts and performances. I must say frankly that these performances were truly professional, at the highest, by my standards of that time, level of acting skills, and the scenery aroused in all spectators simply admiration for its authenticity. During the years of study in Obluchye, I reviewed a lot of first-class productions. I remember how brilliantly they played "Children of the Sun" and "At the Bottom" based on Gorky's plays, and the play "Sentimental Waltz" (I don't remember the author of the play), "Uncle Vanya" by Chekhov, and much more. The puppet theater also educated

us. I remember that I was struck by a puppet engine puffing smoke from a chimney and buzzing like a real one. And the doll-boy, walking along the tracks, noticed a broken rail and, in order to stop the approaching train, cut his hand with a knife, moistened his handkerchief with blood, and with it, like a red flag, stopped the train at the most dangerous place! We, the boys, dreamed of such a feat and began to specially walk along the rails and carry pioneer ties and even knives with us.

I remember that in the same place, in this club, I first saw the sound films "Lenin in October" and "The Great Glow", the impressions from which for a long time cut into our tenacious children's memory. And the color sound film "Sorochinsky Fair" that I saw for the first time did not leave me indifferent.

So, as it seemed to me, I was already well acquainted with the art of cinema and theater, but opera was still an unknown form of theatrical art for me. I knew that they did not speak there, but sang, and I had no idea how I would perceive it. But it affected me in a way that even in my wildest thoughts I never imagined.

They gave the opera "La Traviata", where the main part of Violetta was sung by a local actress Valeeva. Probably, I have never heard such, or rather incomparable, voice, have not seen such artistry and plasticity. Of course, it was just a first impression. Or rather, the first shock! In those years, the Ufa theater had good forces due to the actors evacuated from Moscow, Kyiv and other theater capitals. Even the famous bass Maxim Dormidontovich Mikhailov sang in it. And it shocked me

Valeeva. And the ballet! It turns out that Rita studied in Leningrad at a ballet school, and for her ballet was, and for me now it has also become, a divine pleasure. For a long time I could not forget Odette and Odile from Swan Lake. Yes, do not list everything.

... I was often lucky in my life. I was also lucky here, also in that, having returned to the regiment, a few days later I was suddenly sent to Ufa to a sawmill on the banks of the Belaya River to provide lumber for the needs of the regiment. I was on this trip for two weeks. And what has not been reviewed and re-listened during this time in the Ufa theater in the evenings! And Rita, seeing my interest in the

theater, somehow got tickets, then extra marks. It seems that in my entire subsequent life I never experienced such intense theatrical bliss, except during a 5-year study at the Leningrad Military Transport Academy. In general, for this happy business trip I received an invaluable cultural charge for life and learned so much

about Rita, her mother, about her father, a civil engineer with a conservatory education, personally acquainted with S. M. Kirov. He had a good voice and often performed opera arias and romances at home and at concerts. He mourned with them on the occasion of his starvation in besieged Leningrad. I understood and accepted their way of life, learned their habits and hobbies. And my love for Rita at first sight confidently and quickly grew into a big,

huge love for this fragile, fair-haired, gray-eyed Leningrad blockade. And she already worked as an assembler at the Ufa factory of telephone sets and still had time to go to the ROKK Nursing Courses (ROKK - the Russian Red Cross Society). Her mother, a military doctor, who had behind her both the years of the civil war as a sister of mercy, and the participation of a doctor already in the Finnish war, was now enrolled in the staff of the emerging military hospital. And Rita was also already

listed as a future nurse.

And her brother, 15-year-old Stasik, worked somewhere, earning your labor bread card.

Like a true gentleman, I was looking for an excuse to treat Rita with something. But at that time in Ufa only sticky candies were available without cards,

yes, a thick, hot, sweetish drink called "bread soufflé." Everything ends

sometime. My "logging" business trip ended, and with it my "theatrical season". I left for my Alkino, meetings became rare again, and soon Rita announced that the formation of the hospital was being completed and in a few days they should be sent to the front. I ran to my company commander, senior lieutenant Nurgaliyev, and he allowed me to go to

Ufa, but by the evening I would definitely return. Barely got them home. They were already in uniform and were packing their things. I managed to help them

get into the car and, without waiting for the departure of their echelon, I said goodbye to everyone: I had to have time to return to the regiment. For the first time he saw Rita and her mother, Ekaterina Nikolaevna, in tunics, and for the first time he did not hesitate to kiss my soldier on the lips, wiped the tears from her eyes, barely holding back his own. And, since it was already evening, I rushed to the train, which started off in the direction of Alkino, jumped on the step of the platform on the move, and soon we disappeared from each other's sight.

For several days I did not find a place for myself. I was haunted by the thought that here she was, a girl not yet strong after the blockade, leaving for the front, and I, an adult man who was about to turn twenty, was still in the rear, in a reserve regiment, although many of my fellow officers had already departed for front along with marching companies that we were preparing here. And the commander of the regiment, a front-line soldier, Major Zhidovich, already returns my report with a laconic resolution: "10 days

of house arrest for an untimely request." House arrest then for us sounded like a refusal to be fired in the same Chishmy or Ufa, and even withholding (as we then joked - "to the defense fund") 25 percent of the

monetary allowance for each day of arrest. In violation of subordination, the next morning he ran straight to the regiment commander, but he answered even more concisely: "Don't rush. We'll all be there!" However, soon, already, it seems, fate responded to my tenth report: they began to form an officer team in the reserve officer regiment of the district for further dispatch to the front. And shortly before that, my application for admission wa

candidate member of the CPSU (b). So I was already going to the front, if not yet a full-fledged communist, then still not a young Komsomol member. Maybe this event also influenced the decision of the regiment commander to include me in such a team.

But how unpredictably human destinies sometimes change! In 1960, when 17 years had passed since that memorable 43rd, I, already a colonel of the airborne troops who served in Kostroma, after an operation to remove part of the thyroid gland, went to the Yaroslavl garrison military hospital for a commission for fitness, and or rather, unfitness for further service in the Airborne Forces. And there I met in hospital pajamas my former commander of the reserve regiment, already a retired colonel Zhidovich. You have to be in the same place, at the same time! Well, isn't it fate? And oddly enough, he not only remembered, but unexpectedly for both of us almost

immediately recognized me. It turns out that he, my then commander, soon also asked his superiors to go to the front, took command of the guards rifle regiment, but in the very first battles he was seriously wounded, healed his wounds for a long time in hospitals and remained to serve out his army years until retirement here, in Yaroslavl.

In the long evenings, until they discharged me, deeming me unfit for further service in the paratroopers, we recalled Alkino, and our military deeds and years.

He also told me about the fate of his deputies in the reserve regiment. Major Rodin, a mighty handsome man, died while re-entering the front. Lieutenant Colonel Neklyudov, to us, young lieutenants, who had recently changed their buttonholes to officer shoulder straps, reminiscent of the classical representatives of the officers of the old Russian army with his neat beard and manners, was then of respectable years, he was not sent to the front, but immediately after the end of the war was transferred to the reserve.

My commander also spoke about the daughter of Neklyudov, the librarian of our regiment and the bright star of the regimental amateur concerts, which were held in honor of seeing off the marching companies sent to the army. I still remember her strong, penetrating chest voice, her "over the fields, but over the clean ones." She never became a professional singer, although, in my opinion, she had all the data for this.

Here is a digression into the past happened to us in the Yaroslavl hospital. And then, in 1943, after Rita left Ufa with the hospital, we had an intensive correspondence, a real "postal romance." From her letters, I learned that they settled in Tula, I even remember that the hospital was located in a school on Krasnoperekopskaya Street. (Many years later, when I happened to serve near Tula after the war, we visited here.) Only later, when I was

at the front, Rita told me that now their hospital had become part of the Belarusian front. So once again, merciful fate brought us together on the same front of the war, which allowed us to meet there and no longer part.

At this time, like many young people in love, my poetic passion "cut through", and I wrote poems and even whole letters in verse to my beloved. Some of those front-line records I have preserved. Here are some of them, of course far from perfect:

Flimsy dugout. The wind is angry.
I remember my hometown.
Lunar nights and a warm summer
evening, Waltz on the dance floor
and ... war. I experienced a lot
during the days of separation, But I
did not doubt your love ... I dreamed
that you all stained your
hands in my blood. And
that you bandaged me In a dimly
lit room empty Bombs broken
station. It was a dream... But you
were with me! And here is another
one, from another letter: I write, dear,
every single evening, If I steal at least
half an hour from that war. And then
through the lines I see your
shoulders, I see your clear, gray eyes. This
look, like the sun, warms the heart. It's
like an amulet. He is not afraid of
thunderstorms. In difficult moments, Lovely, beloved, clear eyes add strength.

Of course, these poems are primitive, but even now they smell of that gunpowder time, that fumes of war that we breathed, in which we lived, loved, suffered.

After that memorable meeting in Lochow, which I described in the previous chapter, I even expressed my love for Rita and a request for maternal blessing to Rita's mother, Ekaterina Nikolaevna:

... And on the day when the Victory clock
strikes, The days will come calmer
and brighter, We will be together.
Joys and troubles Rita will share
with me, and I will share with her.
Then let's immediately celebrate the
birthdays That have passed, which
still to be ... Now give us a blessing, To live in

happiness, always, love all our lives ... In some of the previous chapters, I somehow touched on our "military field romance", talked about high feelings that often helped to remain faithful to each other and love itself, which instilled confidence and really added strength in the most difficult moments.

And now, after many years, my conviction does not dry out that it was this love that was the talisman that more than once averted mortal danger from me in clashes with the realities of war, with its bullets, mines, tanks, bombs ... I can't not to tell about

what "trials" Rita herself subjected me to. Around the summer of 1944, she suddenly began to write to me in her letters that she was already married and that she even had a child. I answered her that if all this is already in the past, then our love is not a hindrance, and that her child is our child. I almost believed her

letters, although I could not understand how and when it could happen.

And even when we met in Lochow, this question remained hanging in the air, although I did not doubt either my love or her feelings for me. And early in the morning, dressed in washed, ironed, fresh-smelling underwear and uniforms, I had to hit the road in order to arrive at the indicated place no later than the time determined by me. And it's not in my rules to be inaccurate.

I unfolded the map and found two villages on it, Buda Przytocka and Buda Kuminska, which is not far from the Brest-Warsaw highway, between the cities of Kalushyn, known to me from my stay in the hospital, and Rembertow, one of the suburbs of Warsaw east of the Vistula River. Showed

these villages on the map Rita. Just in case. Moreover, according to my assumptions, I will be there for at least two or three, or even more weeks. We were there, in

accordance with the order of the Commander of the Front, Marshal Rokossovsky, to release the "recovered" penal battalions whose term of stay in the penal battalion had expired, to receive new reinforcements, form combat-ready units from them and prepare them for new, upcoming battles. As Rita told me, an amateur art group constantly operated in their

hospital, in which she, a former student of one of the Leningrad ballet schools, was considered the leading soloist in the dance group.

So, during periods of lull in hostilities, when there are not so many wounded in the hospital and there is no influx of new ones, this team, according to the plans of the political department of the front, "tours" to military units that are on vacation or on reorganization.

And who knows, if a fair wind will carry their initiative somewhere closer to us. (Although during the whole war we, penalized, have never been indulged with such joy.) Especially since it was supposed to go with concerts to the area of the city of Sedlec, and it is somewhat east of Kalushin. So we thought, wouldn't fate give us a "return visit"? Now Rita to me.

In such cases, they say: "Looking into the water!" By the end of the day I reached the villages indicated by the battalion commander, found the headquarters. I met there a new political officer, Major Kazakov, appointed to us quite recently instead of Lieutenant Colonel Rudzinsky, who, it seems, was taken to his new position by our former battalion commander, Colonel Osipov. I was a little surprised to see several more new officers of political workers, apparently also recently arrived in the battalion, but there, in the trenches on the bridgehead, they did not appear.

The battalion commander, when I reported my arrival at the time set by him, grunted with satisfaction and, without even asking about the results of my "vacation", showed me the location of my company in the village of Buda Przytotska, where I went.

I was met there by officers Fedya Usmanov, Zhora Razhev, who had already settled down, and, nevertheless, Zhora Sergeev, commander of a platoon of a machine-gun company, "attached" to my company. The commander of the PTR company, my old friend Petya Zagumennikov, and the commander of the mortar platoon Misha, or as everyone called him Musya Goldstein, were also located nearby. In general, my fighting friends were again next

For me, my orderly, and he was no longer young, about forty years old, former captain Nikolai (I don't remember his last name), chose the house of a lonely Pole named Krul.

The house was unsightly, but we got one large room ("for meetings of the military council" of the company, as Fedya Usmanov put it) and two small ones - one for me, the other for the orderly. Pan Krul, as we called him, was for some reason alone, no wife, no children, but a good dozen laborers and laborers worked for him and his considerable household, who were not driven into German slavery, as we used to see it in Belarus and Ukraine .

Then, in December 1944, we all noticed that a lot of hares were running around the fields, and I decided to use my good shooting skills to treat myself and my friends to hare.

Even in high school, among the few of my classmates, I successfully passed the norms for the Voroshilovsky shooter badge at once of the 2nd stage. And already being a freshly-baked lieutenant, at one of the first lessons with a shooting platoon, in order to show a Red Army soldier who did not hit the target that the rifle was not to blame for his miss, I, standing, without emphasis, from a distance of about 100 meters from the first shot hit a porcelain an insulator on a telegraph pole of a nearby communication line. This insulator shattered before the eyes of the astonished trainees, and the wire hung in the air without support. And, to be honest, I myself was no less surprised by this result, although I understood that at the same time I set a bad example: I shouldn't have damaged the telegraph line, and recklessly risked my authority - what if I wouldn't have hit?

So, on December 14 (a memorable day! It became one of the most important in my life!), at four o'clock in the afternoon I went "hunting" with my pistol (now I had a "TT" instead of a revolver). And not from the first, true, shot, but still laid the hare. I'm returning home with this trophy, and there! .. I look, my Nikolai is helping to remove overcoats from three girls, including my Ritulechka! She took time off from her amateur song and dance

ensemble! Together with her - a neat, with a fine figure and a catchy oriental face, Tatar Zoya Farvazova, and accordionist Lyusya Pegova. All the girls are young, ruddy from the frost, excited! I have already said before that I gave Rita to everyone in the battalion as my wife, to whom I recently went away. Therefore, probably, no one but me was surprised by her appearance here. And I was overjoyed about it. Friends came running and decided to "play" a front-line wedding,

because, in their opinion, our existing de facto marital relations should be consecrated with a wedding ceremony. I was worried, not knowing how Rita would take this

proposal, but she, after exchanging glances with the girls, agreed. Nikolai skillfully skinned the hare, butchered it and began to cook hare stew with an incredible amount of onions and lard. This dish turned out to be excellent, although none of us had tried a real hare stew before. The news of our wedding quickly spread through my friends, and they all gathered in

our "war council" room. Filipp Kiselyov, chief of staff, and deputy battalion commander Ivan Matvienko, my former company commander, and Alexei Filatov, who, despite his approximately ten-year superiority in age, for some reason, were simply called Alyosha (probably, his sociable and cheerful character, his mobility and youthfulness were the reason for this). They quickly collected everything necessary for the feast, each brought something: some saved officer's additional rations, some got pickles and smoked products from somewhere, Valera Semykin somehow got a huge piece of American butter from Zeltser. There was also branded Polish vodka "Monopolka", and even bottles

with some "overseas" trophy wine, kept, probably, for special occasions. I kept looking at

Rita, and she, visibly embarrassed, easily got acquainted with my friends and made it clear that she was ready to play the role of the bride. Then I came to the conclusion that her first marriage, about which she wrote to me, was an unpleasant past for her, and today she will truly become my wife. Apparently, Ekaterina Nikolaevna, her mother, has already blessed us with this important step.

It was a fun and exciting wedding. And with accordions, and with a gramophone, among the records for which I especially treasured "Rio Rita", "Champagne Splashes" and "Amur Waves", which reminded me so much of the dance floor in Alkino. And we danced in this now cramped little room of Pan Krul (by the way, on the fortieth anniversary of the Victory in Izvestia, on January 14, 1985, Rita's memoirs about this event were printed under the title "Front Wedding"). The girls, Lucy and Zoya, got together, explaining that they were obliged to return to their ensemble by the specified date.

No arguments that it's already night acted.

By the way, Zhora Razhev, a very loving guy, our "Don Juan", as they say, had already "laid eyes" on Zochka Farvazova and was terribly upset when she did not reciprocate. And these feeble, but brave girls were not afraid to go through the forest to the highway on a moonless night, to catch a passing car there, although then, not without reason, many were afraid of provocations from the Home Army, which so ingloriously failed the Warsaw Uprising. Zhora

Razhev, probably offended by Zoya, referred to his recent shell shock (which, however, did not prevent him from keeping up with others in wine and vodka interest), did not show any initiative to see the girls off. This mission was undertaken by another Zhora - Sergeev, silent, reliable. He accompanied the girls to the highway, stopped a passing car, which was just going to Sedlec, where the girls had to get to. By the way, already in

1984, Zhora Razhev, whom I tracked down among many of my front-line friends, wrote to Rita and me in the very first letter:

"Dear Sasha and Rita! Thank you very much for being able to achieve your goal and found so many front-line friends. Yes, it's me, Zhora Razhev, your

former, Sasha, platoon commander in 8 OSHB! You, of course, feel good, even I remember very well. And your bandaged head after being wounded on the Oder, as well as a holster with a pistol hanging almost to the knees - only you have one in the whole battalion! And Rita - in that Polish hut in which you became close. Of course, I also remember the flight my friend..."

Other stories happened to Zhora Razhev, connected both with love for the "weaker sex" and with a weakness for alcohol. He was so "special" with us. And as for the "holster

that hung almost to the knees," then all of us, and not only the young ones, were a little smart, fashionable, as best we could and as we were allowed by the situation and the authorities. At that time, I carried a pistol on the advice of some penal sailors "in the navy" and was convinced that it was more convenient in battle. Even our

battalion commander Baturin, who seemed to all of us at that time to be elderly, and his relatively young political officer Kazakov, were also "fashionable": instead of hats with earflaps, they wore "kubankas" with a red, "general's" t

Well, we young people, looking at them, almost without exception switched to "kubankas", since there were craftsmen from the penalty boxes and material

for their tailoring. Meanwhile, our "wedding feast" is over. Everyone quickly dispersed, trying to leave the young alone as soon as possible. While we were having fun, Nikolai had already prepared a "marital bed" for us, sincerely believing, like many of my officer friends, that we had actually been husband and wife for a long time. And I was completely sure that I was not the first man in her life (after all, according to her, she already had a child), but today I would become her new, real husband. Imagine my shock when I realized that she had neither marriage nor child! And as if to commemorate this happy

event in our lives, the new front commander, Marshal Zhukov, who had just replaced Marshal Rokossovsky, on December 18 signed an order conferring the military rank of "captain" on me. I just turned 21 a month ago. But the day of December 14, 1944 became

the celebration of the formation of our family, which was to happily exist for exactly 52 years. Day to day. It so happened that exactly on December 14, but already in 1996, after three heart attacks, my Rita died. We already had two sons, four grandchildren and a lovely great-granddaughter...

The war caught up with my fighting friend, the front-line sister of the Great Patriotic War, already more than 50 years after the Victory, as she caught up with many of my front-line friends. By that time we had lost more than ten of the brother-soldiers I had tracked down. And then, in the 44th,

the Victory was still ahead, and no one at the front knew whether he would live to see it, although everyone hoped for it. In de

The cabre of 1944 was still ahead of the ice-bound Vistula, and the Polish capital Warsaw, and all of Suspended Poland. It was still far from crossing the Oder and the battle for Berlin. And then, right after our front-line wedding, I wrote to Rita

almost prophetic verses: Don't
worry, dear! Nothing will
separate us from you. And in the
spring, at the beginning of
May, the Victory Salute will thunder over the

Earth! How glad I was later that the Great Victory Day came precisely in the spring, and precisely at the beginning of May!

But that was all later. And then, on the morning of December 15, Rita got together in her amateur ensemble. She was worried that the absence of her, the leading soloist, could complicate the first concerts, although she did not know when they would be. I persuaded my wife (with what pride and joy I uttered this blessed word!) to wait a bit to go to the battalion commander, introduce her to my superiors and ask her to "register" the marriage: to certify with a seal the corresponding entries in my lieutenant certificate and in her Red Army book.

When we arrived at the headquarters, Filipp Kiselev, the chief of staff, having learned about the purpose of our visit, told me that he would have done it himself, but the battalion commander keeps the seal with him (he does not even trust the chief of staff, contrary to the order usually accepted in the army), and went to report about our request.

A few minutes later, a round, convex, like a bun, the belly of Baturin, and behind it he himself.

It seemed to me that he gave us some kind of disgusted look, stretched out in front of him with our hands attached to our headdresses in a military salute, and instead of congratulations he cut off: "There is no registry office here. You will register your relationship, if they are serious, after the war." Already turned to leave and added over his shoulder: "If you

survive." I became uncomfortable. Of course, at the front, and indeed in the army, they don't complain about severity, and they don't take offense. However, deliberate rudeness, a dismissive attitude towards subordinates often hurts more painfully than an enemy bullet. Demandingness, and in some cases even rigidity, is needed in the army, and even more so - at the front. But this was not one of those events. Rather, it is elementary bureaucratic rudeness, ordinary lack of culture. But endured, there's nothing to be done. Front subordination! He looked at Rita with concern - and was surprised! She has the same happy face, the same sparkling eyes and a smile that never leaves her lips. I could not resist, kissed her on those lovely lips in front of everyone and thought how strong she was, how easy it would be with her in difficult life situations.

Filya Kiselev, deputy battalion commanders Matvienko and Filatov hugged us both, shook hands with us, and Valera Semykin, who suddenly also appeared here, said something like: "Well, kittens, peace and love to you for many years after the Victory!" and kissed them both. He also called us "kittens" in his letters after the war.

Thank you, dear fighting friends! Your words from your kind hearts have brightened up the bad impressions of Baturin's shamelessness, reduced the bitterness of my resentment against him. These words of yours have been with us always, everywhere, all our lives, not only the long front-line, but also the long post-war period, more

than half a century. After this unpleasant incident with the battalion commander, we jumped for a minute into the hut that became our wedding palace, grabbed a duffel bag, which contained the necessary "theatrical" attributes and some personal items, and ran through the forest to the highway to use a passing car to Sedlec.

I had a mixed feeling: I wanted to send her off as soon as possible (after all, she is a soldier!) so as not to incur the wrath of her superiors for being late,

but even more I wanted at least an extra minute to be together.

But everything has its time, and in a few minutes Rita is already out of the body departing truck waved farewell to me with a handkerchief.

I returned home to the possessions of Pan Krul, and my orderly Nikolai collects our things, a gramophone with records and reports that we are being transferred to a nearby village, also Buda, but already Kuminska, and that this is the order of the battalion commander. I did not immediately understand what caused this movement, but an order is an order. It turned out that the battalion commander was simply more comfortable when all the company commanders were close to each other, although the formed platoons remained in their original places. This seemed to him expedient because there would be less messengers to drive. Yes, and to control us, the company, it will be easier for him. And that's right.

Although that hut in Buda Przytotska became very dear to me, I parted with the not very hospitable Pan Krul without much regrets.

In the new place, I was placed in an apartment building with an elderly Polish woman, who was distinguished by some special cleanliness. Her 17-year-old daughter, Stefa, jealously and carefully watched over the order in the house. It was a ruddy, blood-and-milk, plump-cheeked, beautiful girl. When I called my platoon commanders for a short meeting, I noticed that my

Zhora Razhev was following her very indifferently. And almost all the time of our stay there, he was looking for any excuse to appear in this house and persuade Stefa at least for an evening walk. Stefa was a girl of strict rules and paid all her attention only to me as the main guest and senior commander among other officers. She even knitted warm mittens and gave them to me through Rita on her next visit.

And Zhora, not waiting for the favor of a very young and very pretty girl, but brought up in strict morality, turned his attention to a Russian repatriate (that was the name of women returning to their homeland after German slavery or camps). She was emaciated, unattractive in appearance, and even pregnant. And when I found out that she had been living with George for the second day, I only asked if he was sure of his medical safety and if he was not embarrassed by who she was pregnant from. He gave with resentment in his voice

I understand that "the well-fed does not understand the hungry." And Zhora was three years older than me. I didn't start talking with him on this topic anymore, although there were reasons for this later. I understood that I no longer had the right to act as a judge in this sensitive case. And, to be honest, he did not regret the loss of this right, in return for which he acquired the great happiness of great love.

After some time, riding horses unexpectedly appeared in the battalion, and at the direction of the battalion commander Baturin, who apparently spent his main army years in the cavalry, we began to master the methods of riding.

This science was not easy for me. But perseverance brought its fruit.

Soon, shortly before the New Year, 1945, Rita again managed to escape to my "vacation" for a day or two. Upon learning that I now have my own "transport", she asked me to drive it.

Based on my own, far from sweet experience, I tried to dissuade her from this risky experiment, but, seeing her tanned eyes, I nevertheless yielded, giving her some advice based on my own practice. My main warning was to restrain the restive horse, not allowing him to switch to his favorite canter. My heart skipped a beat when, after the very first steps, the horse rushed off

at a frantic gallop. My attempts to call out to the rider were useless, and she sped off far away, even disappearing from view behind a nearby grove. It took, probably, 15 minutes, which seemed to me an eternity, as

my Amazon appeared, galloping at full speed to the starting point.

And it's necessary, about three or five meters away, the horse stood up as if rooted to the spot, and Rita, flushed, with disheveled hair, hair falling out from under her hat and flying in the wind, happy, not very deftly, but briskly jumped to the ground, and I barely had time grab her.

There was no end to her delight, and when I asked how she felt in the saddle, if something hurt her, she answered: "What are you, it was so great!" Maybe, I thought, she not only studied at the ballet school, but also took riding lessons? To this assumption, she replied that in general she was in the saddle for the first time. My surprise was probably so sincere and genuine that Rita said that

she always dreamed of being a rider, and this, perhaps, helped her adapt to this role. It was

then that the thought came to me about her some special relationship to animals, or rather, them to her. And that's why. I've always noticed that animals often cling to Rita in an unusual way. Even a domestic cat was always next to her, although long-haired, Siberian in general, it seems, do not like caresses.

And somehow already in the 70s we rested in the Pyatigorsk military sanatorium. Naturally, they wanted to visit the place of the duel and the first burial place of Lermontov. When we were standing at the fence of his grave, we suddenly saw a young deer descending from the side of Mount Mashuk. We hid, afraid to frighten him away. But, wow, he walked straight at us and approached Rita, not at all afraid of her. I even managed to take a few pictures that I still have, as confirmation of both this amazing meeting and my guesses that even then my horse somehow in a special way carefully carried this unusual rider, albeit at a gallop! .. The mistress of the house

in which I lodged, and her lovely daughter gave Rita a very warm welcome, I think, just as the wife of a Soviet captain. They called her none other than "Pani Captain".

When Rita got ready to leave, I walked her back to the highway. It was the end of December 1944, and before the attack on Warsaw, which we expected from day to day, Rita once again, already in January, visited me. Her mother, Ekaterina Nikolaevna, was an authoritative doctor in the hospital, with whom both colleagues and the head of the hospital reckoned. Yes, and Rita herself, with her selfless service to medical affairs in the war and her mercy shown to the wounded, also deserved a good attitude from the hospital management. Perhaps that is why these short vacations became possible. In addition, during this period of calm in the fighting of the front, the hospital worked calmly, measuredly, without emergency work. And our front-line wedding was taken seriously in the hospital, without skepticism. Not much time had passed

since Rita's last visit to me, in Buda Kuminska, in January, when the battalion went on the offensive against Warsaw, and already there, before reaching the border with Germany, I managed to transfer Rita from the hospital to myself, in our penal

battalion, but now to the battalion first-aid post, which provides assistance to the wounded directly on the battlefield... And now let's go back a little... CHAPTER 9 Political

proclamator. Preparing for battles. Liberation of Warsaw. Bank. Kutno, "Descendant of the Fritz". Honeymoon trip to the penal battalion. Germany, tanker's revenge. Stargard, Altdamm. Hero Yastrebkov. Rita's baptism of fire. Arrival of Rokossovsky. Throw to the south "Well, you are lucky,

Shurka!" - I remembered the words of my grandfather, a Siberian, a chaldon, Danila Leontyevich Karelin, when I managed to happily get from Lochow on the same day by passing cars to a place on the highway, from where it was within easy reach to the Polish villages indicated to me on the map by the battalion commander.

Yes, and my grandfather himself was also "lucky", when, according to his stories, in his youth he used to go after a bear with a horn and, it seems, 18 times very successfully. Yes, I remember, and I myself saw his luck when, during my winter holidays, in the 3rd or 4th grade, I came to see him in the taiga village of Sagdy-Biru (not far from Birobidzhan). Then, after a three-day hunt in the Far Eastern taiga, he suddenly ran home, urgently harnessed his horse to the sledge and left again for the taiga, and the next day he brought back a dead tiger lying the entire length of the sleigh, whose tail dragged along the snow rut. That was the first time I saw a real tiger. So "lucky" I was, probably, in my grandfather. Before dark, I reached these Polish villages and without difficulty found the headquarters of the battalion.

At first, I sought out Chief of Staff Phil Kiselev, and after learning from him where Baturin-combatant was now, I went to him with a report, rejoicing that I had time on time and that I would not have to look for excuses for being late.

How our meeting happened, I have already told in the previous chapter. And here, in these villages, our days were loaded with both the release of the recaptured penalty box and the formation of new units. A lot of time was spent on writing the most detailed combat characteristics or rewriting those that seemed unconvincing to the battalion commander or his political officer, Major Kazakov, or, in their words, overstated.

The formation of new units here also took place in a new way. So that the commanders of the companies, platoons and other divisions of the battalion "do not get bored", the battalion commander ordered new penalists to be accepted in all companies, to form all full-time platoons, albeit very small in number, and then bring them together under the command of the company commander who would be destined to lead a new consolidated company in the next campaign. I was not the only one who considered the main drawback of this method to be that, at the same time, the commanders of the combined units did not know the majority of their fighters well, and the fighters themselves did not feel each other's "elbow". In battle, this is more important than the important! But an order is an order. Many of us guessed: Baturin introduced his innovation in order to deprive the officers-commanders of time to grow dissatisfied with such a peculiar attitude towards the personnel, which manifested itself

during the offensive battles on the Narevsky bridgehead. Of course, this did not allow the command staff to relax much in conditions of a certain detente after long and very intense hostilities, and to give vent to their nerves after the battles, especially since there was a real danger of calming these nerves with the very "beamer" that the Poles had, as they say, not measured, especially in exchange for some trophy trinkets like watches, lighters, cigarette cases, etc.

In general, there was enough time for many things, but there were no "song evenings" like in Belarus. The general mood was not at all songlike, especially since we all expected a new offensive. The new

battalion commander also established a new order for feeding the command staff while the battalion was out of combat operations. If earlier we all ate from a common soldier's cauldron and only an additional officer's ration distinguished our menu from the contents of the penalty box's cauldrons, now full-time officers ate separately from them, in the so-called "dining room", which was located in a more or less spacious room. They cooked for us separately, I won't say that it was much better than in the company camp kitchen, but we ate not from kettles, but from aluminum bowls. Our menu was occasionally diversified by the cow's milk that fell to our lot by the indefatigable and inventive food chief Moses Zeltser.

It turns out that Lieutenant Colonel Baturin had a weakness for this divine drink, and even at the Narevsky bridgehead, while we were fighting the hardest battles for its expansion, he got a couple of dairy cows, which he then constantly carried with him. Here with

"master's" table and sometimes we got coffee, then tea with milk. The battalion commander and his deputies were trained separately, although almost all deputies, except for the political officer and deputy. along the rear, reaching out to our officer company. I don't think that the battalion commander's table was really "lordly", but the distance was strictly observed. In general, we took this novelty for granted. However, our previous battalion commander Osipov did not strive for such a "distance", and

neither discipline, nor combat readiness or combat capability is reduced.

We noticed, by the way, that sometimes one of our new political workers, Captain Vinogradov, had a meal with the battalion commander and his political officer Kazakov. He held the position of a battalion agitator (and such a position existed!). He was a frail, kind of clumsy, always crumpled, unkempt officer. His unpleasantly shrill voice and peculiar manner, while petty and vainly not even gesticulating, but simply absurdly spreading his arms, aroused hostility, and often irritation of those around him. All these qualities were so inconsistent with his position that they aroused feelings completely opposite to the meaning of his words.

He was one of those demagogues who, with their worthlessness and outright uselessness in the battalion, aroused in combat officers feelings of hostility bordering on hatred. His unintelligent moralizing on any occasion often led to obvious opposition to what he was campaigning for. For example, he persistently agitated all of us not to drink not only "People's Commissar's" cups, but even strong tea, not to smoke, to give up even thoughts about the weak half of humanity. From these boring political proclamations (political lectures, as the officers called his conversations), we got off with frank disdain. And in order to annoy him, in defiance of calls, they deliberately drank strong tea or Polish "kava", while mercilessly smoking cigarettes or shag "goat's feet".

I even composed poems to the melody of Paganel's then popular song from the movie "Children of Captain Grant":

Once upon a time there
was a boastful captain,
He chatted boringly, And he loved
politics like pop
incense... He is
ready to catch you And read
notations, Even
where you think And in a
dream, and in reality, Sings his
song everywhere: "You don't drink,
don't smoke, don't It's harm to
health, and big! It's better you get

involved in politics political instructor of the world ... "We all wondered
then, where did Baturin get such shots from? Is it not from his former
subordinates, who, like himself, spent almost the entire war somewhere in
the rear? After all, Vinogradov did not even have the medal "For Military Merit" - the mo

Well, God be with him, with Vinogradov. Only the authority of Baturin
was not strengthened by this strange closeness. Looking ahead, I will say
that the personal example of the same Vinogradov absolutely did not
correspond to his grandiloquent sayings and moralizing. When, just before
the end of the war (I think, on the third or fourth of May), the issue of the
next State loan was announced, this "agitator" with foam at the mouth
convinced all the officers that it was necessary for everyone to subscribe
for at least a three-month salary, because " it is necessary for a speedy
victory." Yes, we did this before even without him, then handing over
bonds in general to the Defense Fund. When we asked the chief of the
battalion, Kostya Pusik, how much Vinogradov himself subscribed for, we
found out: only for one monthly salary ...

But all this happened much later than the events described, and this
is not what we are talking about now. As I already mentioned, a
decentralized, so to speak, formation and combat training of subunits
began, when several very small platoons were created at once in each
company. I have already spoken about the shortcomings and positive
aspects of this innovation.

Of course, no one (except Vinogradov?) set a goal to completely eliminate the use of alcohol. Moreover, "legitimate" occasions happened, and often - either awards or new military ranks were "washed".

Sometimes at some regular "sabantuy", as Fedya Usmanov called these feasts, on a particularly solemn occasion, it was considered chic instead of a smelly "bimber" to use pure alcohol, which was obtained occasionally, although there were a lot of distilleries in Poland and the Poles successfully and profitably traded in this alcohol .

They drank it, as a rule, undiluted. Among experienced front-line soldiers, it was considered bad form to dilute this alcohol, they simply washed it down with water. In such cases, alcohol was poured into one glass or mug, and a similar container with water was placed next to it. Sometimes they "played a trick" on someone, they also put alcohol instead of water. It is necessary to imagine the feeling of this person when, having swallowed the burning "fiery liquid" and without taking a breath, he hurried to drink it with water, and instead of it poured the same burning dose into the flaming oral cavity. True, the one who arranged such a "surprise" always kept water ready to come to the rescue at a critical moment. Soon my captain's

epaulettes and the new ranks of other officers were "washed". And somehow they especially sadly noted the departure of Marshal Rokossovsky to another, 2nd Belorussian Front, who was loved with a special filial love. Our feelings for him were very clearly expressed much later by his deputy for logistics on

1st Belorussian Lieutenant General N. A. Antipenko: "The whole warehouse of Konstantin Konstantinovich's character ... disposed to him. Everyone truly loved him - from the general to the soldier. Sometimes it seems to me that the secret of inner beauty has not yet been revealed , spiritual qualities of Rokossovsky".

It was then that on this "sabantuy", the unofficial rank of "fine-dad", invented by the penalists of my company, was transformed by someone into a more familiar "dad". It was flattering to me

To a 21-year-old officer, I will not hide, but I was also afraid: what if it comes to Baturin (and cannot reach it), no matter how angry he is even more embittered at me. But there seemed to be no external consequences. Even our special officer did not react at all.

Meanwhile, the replenishment went on, but this time with less intensity. Apparently, the lull at the front, the absence of large-scale, active hostilities did not give the military tribunals a reason to "forge" cadres of penalized for us.

True, it seems to me that for the first time in the entire existence of our penal battalion, a new category of penal battalions began to appear in our country, although rarely: former officers convicted in the early years of the war and even before it began and who had already served some part of their long sentence or in prisons or camps. As it became clear to us, they were not transferred to the front, like criminals in penal army companies, but they were sent exclusively on a voluntary basis, although, probably, accompanied by some kind of guard. Then our

whole country already felt the approach of the end of the war, and many prisoners, in whom the concept of patriotism was still preserved, understood that it would come, the long-awaited and now inevitable, Victory, and then the time for their release, and maybe even an amnesty on the occasion of the Victory. And then it will not be easy for them, who escaped the war and, if you like, the fate of dying in it, like millions of compatriots, to return to another society, scorched by the most difficult war, which defeated the enemy in mortal combat. It will not be easy for them to live among those whose relatives died in the battles for their homeland, putting their lives on the altar of Victory over fascism. It

was such thoughts that led many to the decision to ask for the replacement of the remaining terms of imprisonment with sending them to the active army, albeit as fines. Not everyone who asked to go to the front from there was given such an opportunity. But such cases were not isolated until the very beginning of the Berlin operation. In general, the formation and

training went according to the established procedure, combat training was very intense. As always, special attention was paid to the penalized - former officers of the rear services, as well as pilots, tankers and, in general, to everyone who had weak weapons skills and insufficient marching training. And even more so, on former prisoners, who were physically weaker than others, and had not held weapons in their hands for a long time.

In platoons, there were still a maximum of 7-10 people, and this made it possible for platoon commanders even to draw up individual training and training schedules, if necessary, choosing assistants from among those with combat infantry experience in the penalty box.

For the most part, the trainees understood that it was precisely here that Suvorov's "science of winning" fully justified itself, in particular its postulate "hard in learning - easy in battle." And some of the penalty boxers, who considered themselves "suicide bombers", gradually began to understand that they would not go into battle as "cannon fodder", and they were taught to act better on the battlefield in order to save their lives, confidently hitting the enemy. And most often it helped them understand the need for this intense combat training, as they say, up to the seventh sweat.

Control over the course of combat training, however, was well organized by the headquarters. Deputy battalion commanders, heads of services were constantly in companies and platoons. For us, the commanders of penal units, this training was sometimes no easier than for trainees. Then they found in some quarry a

suitable place for a shooting range, where they fired at targets from all types of small arms, and from an anti-tank rifle - at a padded and burned-out Ferdinand self-propelled gun abandoned by the Germans. In the nearest forest, there was even a fenced area - a range for mortar firing. And almost daily, our mortars hit there from closed positions.

In general, the ingenuity and endurance of our unit commanders and officers of the special services of the battalion could be envied. And the main stimulus for all this was, of course, not so much the vigilant control of the headquarters and command of the battalion as the desire to avoid bringing unprepared people into battle.

Another novelty caused a certain revival in us - the training of company commanders in horseback riding. Whether it is not enough in what situations it could be useful. And this novelty arose because someone somewhere requisitioned several riding horses with full horse ammunition - under the saddle. This was warmly approved by our battalion commander, apparently having spent more than one year of his army service in the saddle. Or maybe it was on his orders that they got us glorious, strong

horses. One beautiful bay stallion, sedate, calm, Baturin chose for himself. I got a young, dapple-gray, obstinate, restless horse. He constantly spun with sensitive, mobile ears and often showed his large young teeth in displeasure. When I saw how deftly, despite my impressive belly, he took off into the saddle and how the battalion commander sat in it like a glove, and how he defiantly pranced on his handsome man, for the first time I envied this perfect skill of Baturin and also set on fire with the idea of mastering this unusual method for me. movement, although he understood that to own it like a battalion commander was an unattainable goal.

Needless to say, it turned out to be no easy task. The first days of my riding exercises did not bring me any pleasure or results. After two or three hours of daily hard training, all my "sciatic" places were desperately sick. But the goal was set, and day after day, although without enthusiasm and passionate desire, I again climbed into the saddle and, still not really understanding the difference between a trot and a gallop, sometimes brought my trotter, and myself, too, to "soaring" with my inability. "

One of my penal fighters, apparently a former cavalryman, seeing my absurdities in handling a horse and in mastering the art of riding, volunteered to be my teacher, and at the same time a horse breeder. He skillfully looked after the horse, gave me lessons, after which the horse began to treat me more calmly, and I began to stand straighter in the saddle, more confidently and more skillfully lean on

the stirrups. It was the end of December 1944. New, 1945, we met in the battalion at the common table. The battalion commander himself, and all his deputies, headquarters, heads of services and unit officers took part in this celebration. It was the first time we had such a friendly feast. The same, but more grandiose both in scale and significance, happened only when the war, which was so disgusting to everyone, but which, paradoxically, has already become familiar to us, ended. It was near Berlin, on the first Victory Day, May 9, 1945, "in the spring, at the beginning of May," as I wrote to Rita back in December

1944. But then victory was far away. Ahead were fierce battles for Warsaw, a difficult path to the border of Nazi Germany, and then to Berlin. And who knew who was destined to get there, and who would stay forever in Polish or German soil. New Year's Eve

In the evening I hastily prepared several dedications in verse to my fighting friends, and how warmly they were received. Even Baturin, not generous with positive emotions, applauded. It turned out that close to the New Year was the birthday of Petya Smirnov, Sasha Shamshin, my namesake and almost the same age, and my former company commander, now deputy battalion commander Ivan Matvienko.

And like a happy forecast for the future under the approval of all my words sounded: The

path is not over. There is still a lot to
go and the way to Berlin is dear to us

- "Forward!". We know! Let's reach
the threshold of the den, the wounded
beast will find a grave there! Let's meet again,
remember the past years, let's drink
for the fallen heroes of the war, let's
drink for happiness, for the

friendship of peoples and for the calm everyday life of the country. This
is

how we met the new, no doubt that it is already a victorious year! The operation to liberate Warsaw and all of Poland that was still under the fascist yoke, as we learned later, was planned by the Stavka to begin on January 20th. Much earlier, British Prime Minister Churchill, in his message, asked Stalin to immediately launch an offensive from the Vistula in order to divert as many German forces as possible there and save the Allied troops who were being defeated in the Ardennes. Stalin went to meet this request for help, and the Headquarters postponed the start of the Vistula-Oder operation to January 12.

And just a few days after the meeting of the new year, we began to hastily reduce our scattered units into single platoons of the company, which was ordered to command Ivan Beldyugov. He was a small captain, a strong, I would even say, thick-set, broad-faced and large-browed officer, who stood out among many for his imperturbable, at first glance, calmness, which, however, was capable of breaking through with uncontrollable harshness.

In his company, platoons were urgently formed by officers with already solid penal battalion combat experience: Captain Vasily Kachala and Senior Lieutenant Alexander Shamshin, as well as Lieutenant Sergei Piseev and Senior Lieutenant Alexei Piseev, who had recently arrived in the battalion

Afonin, modest, smiling, who also seemed very young, but, as we found out later, as much as 4 years older than me and Shamshin. Alexei was broad-shouldered, stocky and, as it turned out, a devilishly hardy man. And the more difficult it was for him, the more perseverance and irony awakened in him, raising the spirit of his fighters. When I got to know

Alexey better, it turned out that we both graduated from the same 2nd Vladivostok Infantry School in Komsomolsk-on-Amur, climbed the same hills, ate in the same cadet canteen, guarded the same objects on guard. True, my promotion to lieutenant took place a little earlier. Alyosha also knew the Far East well, which somehow brought us together. Before college, he served on Lake Khasan, immediately after the well-known events of 1938 there and then in the troops of the Far Eastern Front, and after graduating from college, he left for the active army on the Central Front. A severe wound in the battles on the Kursk Bulge led him to the Novosibirsk hospital. Long-term treatment, then courses for company commanders, and in the end - the position of platoon commander in the 8th separate penal battalion. I never ceased to be surprised how it

was that I, an unfired lieutenant, upon arrival at the penal battalion in 1943, probably due to someone's oversight, was appointed commander of a penal company (battalion commander Osipov later corrected this mistake, giving me a reconnaissance platoon under command). But Alyosha, older than me in age and length of service in the army, having combat experience and a wound, who completed courses for company commanders, was appointed platoon commander. My friend Petya Zagumennikov also came to the penal battalion as the commander of a platoon of penitentiaries after being wounded at the front as a company commander and treated in a hospital. It is clear that they tried to send the most experienced combat officers to command positions in the officer penal battalion, and I, probably,

was a random exception. We had very little time left for combat crews and cohesion of units (that's when the disadvantages of the method of "fractional" formation of them became clear to everyone), and already on January 11, the company in full force went on foot to the Magnushevsky bridgehead, captured in the summer on the western bank of the Vistula to the south Warsaw, and became part of the 61st Army, commanded by General Pavel Ivanovich Belov.

On the already well-worked wooden bridge at night, which turned out to be quite dark, the company moved to the bridgehead. All the ice on the Vistula seemed to have been dug up by some strange plow from shore to shore. These were traces of bombing and shelling. From there, on the 14th, and went on the offensive, along with units of the 61st Army, our company of penalized. The Vistula-Oder strategic offensive operation began. I don't know why, but Beldyugov's

deputy was not appointed (as was, for example, Yanin in Matvienko's company), but I was ordered to go with Beldyugov as a reserve company commander, something like an understudy. Some new system, Baturin's. According to this system, I did not seem to be part of a fighting company, but with my orderly and two more penalists I had to be nearby in order to lead a company if necessary. But it turned out to be so uncomfortable and unnatural - the feeling of your uselessness or incompetence. It would be better for me, a company commander, to be appointed with a demotion as his deputy or even a platoon commander, than to be with him with some indefinite role and not interfere in his affairs. And of course it didn't work out that way. At first, the company was given the task of capturing the height from which the Germans suppressed any attempts to advance our units with hurricane

fire. Both Beldyugov and I came to a common decision: using a stream overgrown with shrubs, which went to the rear of the Germans and flowed into the nearby river Pilica (I remember the name - similar to my last name), bypass this ill-fated height and attack it from the rear. Beldyugov entrusted this task to platoon commander Vasily Kachala. He successfully made a detour of the height unnoticed by the Fritz and soon suddenly attacked them from the rear. It was a breakthrough, designed only for one surprise, and the outcome of the attack depended on its swiftness: either

our fighters would fall down all on this naked, frozen slope, or they would take this damned height. The battle was fierce and, taking advantage of the fact that the Germans moved the fire and all the attention there, to their rear, Beldyugov raised a company to attack from the front.

The height was taken, and the first to reach its foot was a platoon under the command of Alyosha Afonin, with the support of the platoon's machine guns.

Sergei Piseev. We managed to get to Pilica. The losses were not very large.

Many years later, I learned that in August 1914, the young dragoon of the 5th cavalry division, Konstantin Ksaverievich (this is his real middle name) Rokossovsky, was awarded his first military award - "Georgievsky cross." Too bad we don't

knew.

... After capturing the height, the offensive began along the entire front of the regiment, with which the penal company interacted. Soon the entire 23rd Rifle Division, in close contact with the regiments of which our company was now operating, took the direction of the offensive north towards Warsaw, and by the end of January 16, we had captured Vlochy station, which is on the southern outskirts of some suburb of the capital of Poland. After that, the company was withdrawn to the second echelon, and the troops with tanks went further, to storm Warsaw, which was completely liberated on January 17th. Of course, it was a shame for us: we reached Warsaw, but we were not given the honor to enter it with battles. Probably, it was considered wrong that it was the penalty boxers who liberated at least some part of the Polish capital. It was probably considered unprestigious (although, in my opinion, this word was not widely used then). So we did not enter Rogachev, and Brest went around, and now we were not allowed to enter the capital of the first Western country, the most beautiful city in Europe, as liberators. It's a pity, but each of us understood this fact in our own way. We were a means to ensure the success of others. And that explained everything. But still, we received Stalin's gratitude

for the liberation of Warsaw. And only on January 18, we, who entered Warsaw after the units of the 23rd division

of the 61st army, were still allowed to see this handsome city. First impression - terrible destruction. These are traces of the suppression by the Nazis of the failed uprising of the Varsovians, and the results of a deliberate undermining of the best, most beautiful buildings of the city. The inscriptions in Russian on the walls of houses "cleared" or signs mounted on stakes driven into the ground caught my eye: "Checked. No mines." And when we were on the Marshalkovskaya street leading to the city center, we noticed several groups

sappers with dogs who continued their dangerous work of demining the city. These dogs carefully sniffed out the explosives planted by the Nazis. Then I thought how difficult it is for them to do this, if the whole city smelled of gunpowder and dynamite fumes. Yes, in addition to my knowledge about orderlies, about kamikaze dogs throwing themselves under tanks with explosives attached to their backs, now I have also added the idea of the faithful assistants of our valiant sappers. Here we were stopped by a

group of military men who were already patrolling the streets, and did not let us go further along this wide, apparently once most beautiful street, now littered in many areas with fragments of destroyed buildings and burned-out fascist tanks. It turns out that there have not yet been put up signs "Mine cleared". They turned to the right and soon, somewhere near the banks of the Vistula, they saw a badly damaged building, on the pediment of which they could hardly read and translated into Russian the words: "Polish Emission Bank."

And since there were no guards, the doors were wide open, so they decided to enter. God, how much and what kind of money we didn't see in the basement! And Polish zlotys in large thick packs and in bulk, and still uncut sheets with banknotes printed on only one side, and German occupation Reichsmarks. We

laughed at the abandoned millions, kicked these wads of money, and I didn't even take them as souvenirs. After the "excursion" to the bank, we all gathered at a designated place on the western outskirts of Warsaw, once again convinced of the vandalism of the Nazis, who had turned a significant part of the city into ruins. Our officers, and even the penitentiaries who participated in the battle of Stalingrad, compared these ruins with those of

Stalingrad. Either because I did not officially take part in the battles for Warsaw, or because Baturin simply realized (or maybe he was told) that my position as a "understudy" for military operations was unnatural, he ordered me and several other officers to move on independently, each once indicating on the map the point at which we should arrive by a certain time. I don't remember now the names of cities and towns where I had to get in different ways, but according to the front-line gratitude I have from the Supreme Commander-in-Chief Stalin for taking and

the liberation of some cities in Poland, my path ran through Sokhachev-Lovich-Skierniewice-Tomaszow-Konin-Lenchits. ... Fritz

are running, running! Either from the unheard-of pressure of our troops, or from the mere name of Marshal Zhukov, who became the commander of the front, although the name of Rokossovsky inspired no less fear in the Germans. The retreat of the Germans after their expulsion from Warsaw was often just a banal flight, but often quite large groups of unfinished fascists remained in our rear, in the forests, who continued to resist. To eliminate them, it was necessary to allocate considerable forces.

Well, my comrades and I mostly traveled by passing cars, and even on Polish horse-drawn carts. Several times, when passing military vehicles did not stop at our request by the usual "vote", we had to use a more reliable method of stopping - firing a pistol at the wheels. Of course, this method was dangerous. After all, you can get and not on the wheels, and then - the tribunal. But for some reason it didn't scare me. Somehow, a major jumped out of a car stopped by this method and, also drawing his pistol, threatened to send me to the penal battalion for such a thing. Then I shoved my badge of captain of the 8th OSHB up his nose. He was taken aback for a while, and then we made peace, and we were safely taken to the desired point. And in the back of the car that took us, rushing past snow-covered fields or strictly

defined forest plots and small groves, I liked to stand, leaning on the cab, exposing my face to the headwind. From his knife, burning jets, cheeks were frozen and lips were stiff. This feeling reminded me of my native Far East and my frosty childhood with frequent trips on the open steps of a speeding train when I traveled 40 kilometers from Obluchenskaya secondary school in the winter home for the weekend and back.

... On February 10, I arrived in the city of Kutno, where the battalion headquarters was already located, and a day later our rear services were concentrated there, or rather, their mobile (in cars and wagons) units.

This town turned out to be very cozy, not at all touched by the war. In Kutno, there was even running water and electricity.

Probably, either the Germans spared this city for some kind of merit, or they scampered so without looking back that they did not have time to spoil it. But on the walls of the houses and on the fences, the inscriptions "Pst!" ("Shut up!") with the image of a finger pressed to the lips. I remember that we also had posters and billboards on the roads with similar content: "Don't talk!",

"Chatterbox is a godsend for a spy," etc. I got a neat, behind an impressive fence, under the red tiles, the house of some local veterinarian. The pretty hostess, having placed me, offered to take a bath. What a blessing it was! And a fragrant, odorous soap, and a fluffy towel! They put me in a room with a good bed and a sofa, a large desk, on which a large table lamp with a green shade shone comfortably. The hostess was very attentive.

I found out where the officers who were on the staff of my company were stationed. It turned out that in addition to Fedya Usmanov and Zhora Razhev, they enrolled in me a very short battalion who had recently arrived in the battalion, a thin, but very handsome junior lieutenant Kuznetsov, who had already been nicknamed the "grasshopper" because of his fragile physique, weak, not at all a commanding voice and the ability to blush like a girl in the most inappropriate situations. I wanted to get to know him better, and I invited him to move in with me. Moreover, this decision was prompted by the fact that our "Don Joruan" Zhora Razhev had already managed to offer me his company. Realizing that he had already appreciated the charms of my mistress and that this transition of his to me could end in some scandalous trick on his part, I did not succumb to his persuasion, referring to the fact that I wanted to get to know the "grasshopper" better.

We stayed in Kutno for several days, and I was told a story about a "cobet" (as young women are called in Poland), who, during the years of German occupation, cohabited with an officer from some SS punitive squad, giving birth to this SS boy, who at that time was two years old. The German officer fled, not thinking of taking both this girl and his descendant with him. It was on this topic that I wrote not at all lyrical poems, titled them "The Descendant of the Fritz." They also contained the following words: A

soldier will never come to
terms with the justification of such a cobet:

everyone knows that children were suffocated in gas chambers at the hands of the Aryans. OK. Let those children be alive!.. Let them grow up. But only then, Aryan blood will freeze in the veins, if they find out

who was their father. An all-consuming hatred for the SS, for the Aryans, and in general for everything German, overcame us. This is wrong, I understand today, but hatred of enemies sat firmly in our minds then. Catch phrases like "you can't defeat the enemy without learning to hate him with all the strength of your soul" or "if the enemy doesn't give up, they destroy him" came to mind. So they learned to hate, sought to destroy. And posters, and newspapers, and movies, and biting publications by Ilya Ehrenburg and other famous writers called: "Kill the German!" They understood, of course, that it was necessary to kill those who came to the land of our Motherland with fire and sword, but contrary to logic, our hatred extended to all Germans, to everything German, enemy. Even German leather belts with a plaque on which "Got mit uns" ("God is with us") stood were not needed by our fighters, and therefore did not

they exchanged with the Poles.

Here, in Kutno, another event took place. Somewhere already in Belarus, they caught Kasperovich, who had fled on the Narew, a penalty box, who then, in October 1944, under the pretext of restoring the broken telephone connection, deserted from the battlefield. And now, in January 1945, they caught him and for some reason brought him to our battalion. Probably, someone wanted, as a warning to other penalists, to arrange a demonstration meeting of the Military Tribunal, and perhaps a demonstration execution, which he deserved at that time. Probably everyone here thought so then: both officers, commanders, and penal officers.

Since he could not be left unguarded, the battalion commander decided to place him in the attic of the house where the headquarters was located. They put up a sentry, also from the penalty box, to guard him, strictly warning him of the responsibility for lynching, regardless of the circumstances under which this, God forbid, happens. Kasperovich, realizing this, began to provoke the sentry with a demonstration of attempts to escape and even began to dismantle the tiled roof and throw tiles at

sentry. He suffered a little, calling the arrested man to order, but in the end he could not stand it and shot him, wounding him in the shoulder.

I had to send Kasperovich to the nearest infirmary, keep guards there, because even in such a difficult wartime, according to some rules, it was believed that a wounded or sick person could not be judged, much less executed. And until he was treated there, there was no visiting session of the tribunal, and what happened to him in the end, I don't know. It was not up to him, other events distracted from this story.

Then the battalion commander, already in mid-February, set me the task of getting to our rear units remaining in those Polish villages in which we all were before the attack on Warsaw (so I didn't understand then why Baturin entrusted this task to me, in fact, already completely freed from that strange position under Beldyugov). And this task was to orient the rear services workers who remained there, where they should move in order to connect with the main services and the battalion headquarters.

I orientated Sergeant Fermanyuk, who remained in charge of this rear unit, by handing him a map with the route to Kutno marked on it. And he himself, without the prior consent of the battalion commander and under his own responsibility, decided to make a detour and go to the hospital to Rita. Well, at least look at it, since the hospital still remained in its original place, in Lochow, despite the fact that the front line had already moved far to the west. But it didn't work out the way he expected. Rita, rushing to me and hanging on my neck, suddenly

requested to go with me to the penal battalion. Apparently, she had already discussed this option with her mother, since, to my surprise, she supported her request. Still not knowing how my battalion commander Baturin would react to this, I agreed to this "double game", fearing that it would not be easy to persuade the head of the hospital to

this step.

However, quite unexpectedly for me, the head of the hospital (and he was the captain of the medical service Nisonov), having received us without delay, cordially congratulated us on the recent front-line wedding and, almost without hesitation, gave his "go-ahead" and ordered someone to urgently draw up the relevant documents. Such a conflict-free

the solution, which seemed to be a very difficult question, as Rita later told me, was explained simply: she informed both her mother and the head of the hospital that she was going to go to her husband to the front, wherever he was and whatever it cost her .

And now in our hands is either a vacation ticket, or an instruction "to leave for a new duty station in military unit 07380." And literally on the same day, without any farewell ceremonies, Rita, having collected her simple little things in a backpack, was ready for her "honeymoon trip to the penal battalion."

After whispering something with her mother and brother and kissing her girl friends very shortly, under the approving parting words of doctors, sisters and some of the wounded who poured out of the hospital, Rita waved her farewell to them, and we set off on our way in search of a passing car. Having reached some railway station, we were surprised to learn that trains were already running towards the front. In a freight car, to the sound of wheels, huddled together from the cold, we drove west, not imagining surprises and the end of our journey. I constantly checked on the map whether the names of the stations that came across coincide with the direction we need. Luckily, everything has matched so far. Somewhere, before reaching Kutno, the train stopped, because there the railway had not yet been restored. Then we traveled by passing cars. The battalion headquarters was not in the same place, it had already gone

forward. But, fortunately, by that time Fermanyuk had reached here with his small convoy, and together, having received information from the local military commandant about the further points of the headquarters, we set off. Judging by the map, somewhere not very far away there should already

be the border of Germany, the lair of the very beast that tormented our Soviet land for three years, and now it's time to pay for the atrocities. And although we have been waiting for this moment for many months, it still somehow suddenly came. Having crossed a nondescript bridge across an equally nondescript rivulet, we saw a large stand with what seems to be the inscription: "Here it is, damned Germany!" and immediately behind the bridge, at the turn of the road, a standard pole with a surviving still

a German pointer: "Berlin...km" and a plaque already tied by one of ours with a catchy inscription in Russian: "To Berlin!!!".

We drove a little more and suddenly, in front of the entrance to some village, we saw several parked cars and a group of military men near them. We stopped too. Let's go with Rita and Fermanyuk to find out if we can go further. They came closer and ... were dumbfounded by a terrible sight: five or six naked human corpses were laid across the road, among which were women, a teenager and even a child of 6-7 years old. Apparently it was family. They lay face up, strictly in a row, and their bodies were pressed into the ground. Judging by the tracks of tank tracks, some of our tankers thus avenged Germany for the fascist atrocities on our land, and maybe for those who died at the hands of the Nazis

your family.

... Rita turned away, buried herself in my shoulder, her body began to shudder in barely restrained sobs. I took her to our cars and tried to calm her down. And she kept repeating through sobs: "Well, why is that! Well, why !!!". And in this tanker, who committed such a

crime, I thought, I probably spoke not just hatred, but inhuman malice, which can still be understood, but cannot be justified! Of course, the war went through each of us with the same bloodied German boot. Everyone knew and remembered how SS knackers and thugs tortured women and children, burned them alive and hanged them, killed them in gas chambers. It is impossible to forget this even through the centuries. Forgive too. But we are not fascists, we cannot be like them...

We drove around this terrible place, making a solid detour through the virgin lands. And they were silent for a long time. Rita kept sobbing, and I was occupied with memories and reflections, oh, how difficult.

Yes, of course, we hated the Nazis boundlessly. And it was difficult to reduce the height of this hatred somehow, especially when our enemies entered the land. I also remembered my own words, written in the same Kutno: ... everyone lost, who is a daughter, who is a son, who is an old mother or father, and for this bestial arbitrariness we swore to beat the bastards to the end.

Yes, and now "here it is, damn Germany." You involuntarily consider this to be the frontier that we all strived for so long and stubbornly, but which many and many of our soldiers who laid down their lives far from here - in Belarus, near Stalingrad, in Ukraine and on this Polish land alien to us - did not manage to reach. They died in the name of all of us so that we could get here. They lie in swamps and forests, at the bottom of ravines and in snowy fields. And who knows if anyone will ever find them to convey the news that we finally got to the very fiend of evil. We remember all of you by name, and right now, having entered the land of the enemy, we say: and your sacrificial names are now crossing this line, this frontier with us, because without the last step in your life, we would not have reached here.

And we still remember the oaths over the graves of fighting friends - to take revenge! And our unbridled desire for the not-so-distant Victory is the embodiment of our oaths.

It is difficult, of course, to keep the entire army, which fought for almost 4 years, from such a thing. But we fought not with the German people, but with their army, aggressive, criminal, drowning the lives of millions of Soviet people in the blood - women, the

elderly, and children! And we are fighting to destroy fascism and its troops, personifying the bestial, bloody Nazi "new order". But we remember the words: "Hitlers come and go, but the German people remain."

Probably, these are not isolated cases, which we saw here, and forced the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to soon issue the strictest order on cruel punishment, up to and including execution, of those who will vent their, albeit understandable, hatred of fascism on the civilian population. And, as time has shown, this curbing of the avengers' emotions very quickly gave its results. How effective this order was is evidenced by the fact that by the beginning of the Berlin operation, several people convicted of such actions had arrived at our penal battalion.

... For a long time we drove in silence, each immersed in his own thoughts. Many settlements were deserted: either the population fled with the retreating troops under the influence of false Goebbels propaganda, or they were forcibly driven away. It was already behind the Oder that there was practically nowhere to run, and almost every window hung w

flags (sheets) as a sign of surrender. And in this, still pre-Döder, part of Germany, the inhabitants came across very rarely, more often there were refugees from fascist captivity, rather emaciated and ragged.

We caught up with our headquarters already when Beldyugov's company was thrown into battle to repel the counterattacks of the Nazis near Stargard, where their large forces from the East Pomeranian group, squeezed by the troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front, already under the command of Marshal Rokossovsky, tried to break

through. To make the situation there clearer, I will refer to General S. M. Shtemenko's "General Staff during the War Years" (Book 2, p. who had already crossed the Oder and captured bridgeheads in some places, the Germans launched a large counteroffensive. From the same book it is clear that it was then, in February 1945, that the 1st Belorussian Front was forced to turn a significant part of its forces in the direction of Eastern Pomerania to fight against the resisting 2nd German Army in Schneidemühl. The enemy managed in a short time to change the balance of forces in their favor, and on February 17, the Germans launched a strong counterattack from the Stargard area, which pressed our troops, including the 61st Army. In the interests of one of the divisions, that is, the 23rd, with which the penal company began fighting on the outskirts of Warsaw, this company was again brought into battle to repel German attacks. The large reserves thrown there by Marshal Zhukov, together with the troops of Rokossovsky, broke the stubborn resistance of the Nazis, and already on March 1, movement forward began again, and by March 5, the penal company had already finished off the remnants of the Stargard garrison. The city was free.

I did not have time for these battles, but, as their participants later told me, it was a many-day fierce battle, somewhat similar to the battles to encircle the Germans near Brest. The same hot, desperate, who did not give the Fritz a single chance. And the losses there were also considerable.

I saw Stargard already on the 10th of March. It was a large city, but, like many German cities in which the Nazis offered stubborn resistance, almost all of them were burned and destroyed.

And before that, I found the battalion commander, reported on the arrival of the rear of the battalion in full force, without losses. And, of course, using

his good mood, reported on the transfer of his wife from the hospital to our battalion. He introduced her, and she reported strictly in accordance with the regulations that she had arrived for further service and submitted an order to him. I, somewhat in a hurry, so as not to see what the reaction would be to such a "surprise", asked his permission to send "junior sergeant Makaryevskaya to the battalion first-aid post at the disposal of the captain of the medical service Buzun." Baturin, apparently not expecting such a turn of events, somehow vaguely shrugged his shoulders and ordered to tell our doctor Stepan Petrovich to establish the scope of her duties. Well, thank God! Everything turned out

as well as possible. And Beldyugov's company, which had noticeably thinned after Stargard, "licked its wounds" and, together with the second echelon of the division, advanced after the tank units to the Oder, towards Stettin. The battalion commander again found a use for me. While Beldyugov's

company was in the second echelon of the rifle division, it moved directly behind its regiments, without losing readiness to enter battle at any moment. I was instructed to form a company from the new replenishment, which was to either replace the fighting company in a critical situation, or at the right time to join its combat strength with its platoons. Part of the headquarters and rear of our

ShB, except for those of their units that provided the company in the offensive, changed their place of deployment every two to three days, depending on the speed of advance of the front line. The main part of the battalion first-aid post was also in the same group, and its other part, headed by paramedic Ivan Demenkov, advanced along with Beldyugov's company. Therefore, our battalion doctor Stepan Petrovich accepted an experienced nurse into his staff with approval and began to meticulously prepare her for new duties, which differed markedly from her experience as a hospital ward nurse acquired in a hospital. After all, now she will have to deal with dressings in combat conditions.

And so we continued to move behind the divisions of the first echelon of the 61st Army, now almost catching up with their forward units, now lagging behind by 5-6 kilometers. And around March 15, when the division stopped advancing, met with stubborn resistance from the enemy, we approached the area on the outskirts of the city of Altdamm,

which covered with its location the eastern bank of the Oder opposite Stettin. Here I received an order that I had formed, frankly, not yet a company, but something like a "half-company", consisting of one and a half platoons, to attach to Beldyugov's company. As

Aleksey Afonin, who was then a platoon commander at Beldyugov, reminded me in his letter now, in 2002, our "half-company" caught up with them at dawn somewhere in the area already close to the eastern outskirts of Altdamm, where the fines were preparing to storm this city . Those one and a half platoons, which I brought already armed, were quickly distributed among the platoons of the main company, small by that time. The platoon under the command of the "grasshopper" became part of it as a whole, and the junior lieutenant Kuznetsov himself replaced Alexander Shamshin, who had retired due to injury.

Thus began the baptism of fire Kuznetsov. But, as I discovered a little later, the baptism of fire fell here to the lot of Rita, who, it turns out, convinced Dr. Buzun to send her to the front line, and he personally arrived here and created, as it were, an advanced link of his first-aid post, consisting of a paramedic and a nurse, who practically became part of the company in the role of a medical instructor and a front-line nurse.

And again I seemed to have nothing to do with it, since there were no instructions about where I should be after I handed over my "half-company". Naturally, in anticipation of serious battles, and also because Rita was already here, I again assumed (already on my own) the role of that very "understudy" that I played during the capture of the suburbs of Warsaw, with which Beldyugov gratefully agreed. I ended up not far from both the company commander and Alyosha Afonin's platoon. Kuznetsov's platoon was to the right. Ivan Beldyugov brought to me the task he had received to attack the Germans through the battle formations of the division's rifle subunits. Again, we are the first to break the resistance and the first to take the fight in the city ...

And the city was the only and almost the entire length of a straight, fairly wide street, stretched along the coast and built up with stone buildings. The eastern outskirts of the city were turned towards us by the rear side of the main buildings, utility yards, vegetable gardens, and was captured quickly, as they say, in one breath, although the Germans put up stubborn resistance and our losses were tangible. The wounded were bandaged and

they were dragged "to the rear", 50-60 meters away, to the gardens of Vanyusha Demenkov and Rita, who deftly and quickly, where by dashes, and where she crawled to the wounded.

The other side of the street was bared with destructive machine-gun fire from countless basement windows of stone buildings, turned by the Fritz into a whole chain of embrasures. Beldyugov asked through his contact from the regiment of the division to roll out anti-tank guns for direct fire, but for some reason they did not respond to his request, maybe these guns were not close. An attempt to replace artillery with hand grenades yielded nothing. The distance to these embrasures was decent, and practically not a single grenade hit these stone windows, and there was no point in wasting them. Yes, and shooting at the windows from the PTR did not bring the expected effect. I was oppressed by some disturbing feeling of helplessness of the

company and my personal uselessness in this situation. Moreover, there was still no certainty that there was no enemy left in the houses already captured on this side of the street. And what if the company nevertheless decides to attack, will the German machine guns not whip in the back? I, probably like Ivan Beldyugov, was feverishly looking for a way out of this situation. The commander, it turns out, also came to the conclusion that it was necessary to "review" the captured houses and ordered Kuznetsov to organize such an inspection with part of his forces. And not in vain: in several houses on the second floors and in the attics, machine-gun firing points lurking there were discovered and destroyed.

And here I saw Rita suddenly crawling towards us. It became uncomfortable: after all, her place is where the wounded are, and not here, in this hellish fiery den! He shouted at her, with signs and for some reason in a whisper (stupid, he wouldn't hear anyway!) He tried to let her know that it was very dangerous here, but at the same time he felt something like pride in her fearlessness. The

successful result of checking our "rear areas" to some extent instilled confidence that this measure turned out to be both correct and timely, and extremely necessary for our further actions. It remained to decide how to capture the buildings on the opposite side of the street. And at that moment, platoon commander Afonin with a penalty box Yastrebkov crawled up to me, recently

transferred to Afonin from my "half company". They proposed an incredibly bold, but, as it seemed to me at first, impracticable idea. And it consisted in the fact that in our section, where the street is a straight line, Yastrebkov, having collected the maximum number of grenades in his pockets and gas mask bags, will try to portray a defector. Having reached the opposite side of the street, he, clinging to the walls of houses so that the Fritz could not get him out of their embrasures, will throw one or two grenades into them and thus suppress these firing points that prevent the company from going on the attack. And in order for the Germans to believe that this is really a defector, he will jump out from behind the house shouting "Nicht schiessen!" ("Don't shoot!"), with our hands up, and we will all have to open fire supposedly at him, but in fact significantly

higher.

I could not immediately agree with this option. But not because he did not trust the penalty box. He took a mortal risk himself, and we understood him correctly. After all, he probably didn't see any other way out either.

I remembered him from the period of formation of my "half-company". He then seemed to me a reliable fighter, who already had the experience of a rifle company commander before the penal battalion, there were traces of three orders on his tunic. And while we were forming, he was my squad leader, more than once he showed enviable ingenuity and quickness. Probably, there is no person in the

war who would not be afraid of a bullet or a fragment from a shell in battle. But, apparently, in this case, the fighter, and even more so the former officer with a well-established command consciousness, who had not yet lost a sense of personal responsibility for the outcome of the battle, in this situation was so absorbed in the course of the battle and preoccupied with its outcome that personal security issues, as a rule, receded into the background. I observed this state in many of my comrades, for example, in Yanin, Semykin, Sergeev and others. I noticed this in myself as well.

I could not agree with this proposal also because now they were not my subordinates. He advised Afonin to report his proposal first to the company commander. He approved it and gave the most detailed instructions on this matter to the rest of the platoons, obliging them to bring to each fighter the meaning of their comrade's plan and to provide a plausible imitation of opening fire on

"traitor defector", not forgetting to keep the embrasure windows under fire. They

collected two gas mask bags of hand grenades for him, and he also stuffed his pockets with them. Having chosen the moment, he crawled a little forward, jumped up, threw his machine gun on the ground and, with raised hands, in one of which there was some kind of white rag, yelled at the top of his lungs: "Nicht shissen! Nicht shissen!" Looping and falling, he rushed to the houses on the opposite side of the street, and the company opened friendly fire on the "defector". How we all worried about our daredevil! Will this, at first glance, crazy idea succeed and will this brave fighter not die in vain, not having reached the cherished goal.

And how joyful it was in his heart when he finally managed to cling to the wall of one house. Barely taking a breath, he, literally pressing into the wall, "sticking" to it, began to slowly creep up to the nearest window. Throwing at him with about a two-second delay so that the Fritz did not have time to throw them out of the basement, two grenades one after the other and waiting for the explosions, he ran to another and so from embrasure to embrasure with grenades already prepared, he confidently moved forward, and behind him these just death-spitting gun emplacements fell silent one after another. And soon the red rocket raised the company to the attack. At first, Afonin's platoon rose, followed by the rest of the company. Having overcome this ill-fated street with a throw, the penalists finished off the reviving firing points, surrounded the houses, preventing those who tried to hide in all sorts of outbuildings or escape to the banks of the Oder with vegetable gardens from escaping. The success was

complete! And Afonin's platoon discovered nearby some village that had not been noticed before, from which a group of Fritz hurried to help those who were already being smashed by Beldyugov's penal company. The platoon commander quickly got his bearings and led his platoon to cut off their path. Strong fire forced these fascists to lie down, and then surrender.

Almost immediately behind the penal company, first in the same sector, and then in others, subdivisions of the regiment of the 23rd division also went on the offensive. By the middle of the day the city was taken. Rifle units were fixed on the banks of the Oder, and the company that completed the next task was withdrawn. Altdamm taken! It was March 20th. Memorial date.

Losses were still significant. As Rita later told me, she managed to pull out many of the wounded from under fire. I then asked how much. "I don't know, I didn't think so," she replied. And when I asked the senior lieutenant of the medical service Ivan Demenkov about the same, he said that there were twenty people. Well done, Ritulya, did not let us down. I'm proud of you!

By evening, the battalion headquarters also approached. Our battalion commander ordered Beldyugov to leave those who were already subject to release due to their terms and military affairs, and to transfer the rest to me to form

a new company. They took us to one of the outskirts of Altdamm, and there the habitual formation. There was also free time.

I chose a small house in which Rita and I were accommodated. Not far away, Afonin and Kuznetsov settled down, and all the other officers of the battalion.

On the street, not all the corpses of the Germans had yet been removed and buried, and it was already the end of March, the sun warmed up so much that in the daytime we already walked without overcoats and without our sheepskin vests. Only

"kubankas" and hats have not yet been changed to caps or caps. Rita somehow matured, prettier, even a little plumper. It was then we guessed that she was pregnant. And then I asked her if it was scary on the front line. "It's scary, but then I didn't think about it." - "Could you kill a German, a living person, over there, on the

battlefield?" - "Probably, I could, I don't know ..." Soon the results of the company's actions in the Vistula-Oder operation were summed up. Captain Ivan Ivanovich Beldyugov received the highest military Order of the Red Banner for that time, Afonin and Kuznetsov received the Order of Alexander Nevsky, and the penal Yastrebkov received the Order of Glory III degree. He regretted, however, that it was not the medal "For Courage". Beldyugov introduced him to her, but Baturin, either out of "kindness", or with intent, made a presentation already without

five minutes reinstated in an officer's rank to the soldier's Order of Glory. A few more people were awarded, but I, who was listed in the combat unit only as an understudy, naturally, was not awarded. But Rita, at the insistence of our doctor Stepan Petrovich, was presented with the medal "For Military Merit". We were very happy with this...

A few days later it became known that the strip of the 1st Belorussian Front, in anticipation of a decisive offensive on Berlin, was significantly narrowing and we would have to redeploy much further south.

I was engaged in the formation of a company and preparing it for redeployment, when the commander of the 2nd Belorussian Front, Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky, unexpectedly drove up to the battalion headquarters. He has already established a reputation as a marshal, who often happens directly in the troops. Here, too, he arrived at the section that departed from the 1st Belorussian to him. Or maybe he knew that the same "Rokossovsky gang" (as the Germans dubbed us) was located here, and decided to visit her. At least that's what I wanted to think.

I was not lucky again, as then, near Zhlobin. I did not have time to understand the situation and go up to see the famous commander. And what happened there, I do not undertake, not being a witness, to describe. I'd better give one more excerpt from the essay "Military Field Novel" by Inna Rudenko ("Komsomolskaya Pravda", January 19, 1985), in which, according to Rita, she described this episode:

There was a strict order - do not take women into penal battalions. And suddenly Rokossovsky arrived. He got out of the car, tall, stately: "What is this? Where is the woman from? The wife of the commander? So what? Immediately withdraw from the battalion!" And a woman remained in the car - her face, beautiful, pale, without a smile, was well known from the screen, where she always smiled. (As it turned out, it was the film actress Valentina Serova.)

And Rita made up her mind, she would have made up her mind to do anything to be with him at this difficult time: "Besides me, there is another woman here, Comrade Marshal." And imploringly, not according to the charter, she pressed her hands to her chest. And Rokossovsky, who quickly glanced at her figure, which was beginning to gain weight, suddenly waved his hand: "Okay, sergeant."

Soon I became aware that my company would take part in crossing the Oder in one of the sectors north of the Kyustrinsky bridgehead already captured by the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front. That's where, to the south, we were all urgently transferred. Well, how the preparations went for what was later called the Berlin operation, how the crossing of the Oder itself went, and what followed all this, I will tell in the next chapter.

Chapter

10 Ahead of the Oder and Berlin. Rita's pregnancy With whom are we going to "the last, decisive battle." "Old man" Putrya, anecdotist Rare. Forcing the Oder. Fight on the bridgehead. The death of the former pilot

Ridiculous. Last wound. Rita in the hospital We concentrated after a long and tiring march in some six kilometers from the Oder, a neat German village, mostly built up with stone two-story buildings. There were no inhabitants left in it, everyone managed to escape for the Oder, although the destruction in the village was not visible. The Germans abandoned everything: furniture, beds covered with feather beds (lush feather beds are an obligatory attribute of any German residential building), and a variety of kitchen utensils. Generally comfortable. In one house (rooms 3-4) fit all

the officers of the company. One room was occupied by Rita and I, the others - by my platoon officers, foreman and company clerk ...

The business executives near our house quickly organized an officer's "dining room" in Baturin style. Thick kitchen odors constantly began to reach Rita and me on the second floor, to which she was very picky. We no longer had any doubts that everything was going on as usual. Some previously unknown feeling was born in me. Ritino's condition became so publicly known that in the "dining room" the guys often put aside their portions of delicious

herrings for her.

Our battalion doctor Stepan Buzun once came to us and bluntly announced that, in connection with the pregnancy, he categorically excludes Rita from working on the front line and that she will henceforth, to the best of her ability, only help him in the battalion first-aid post, and that his decision was agreed with the battalion commander .

When we got used to this village, we decided where the headquarters was, where the battalion commander's housing was, we noticed that a woman flickered in his house. I wondered if he had miraculously warmed up the remaining German woman. She was a rather plump, short, stout woman with a somewhat puffy, but not devoid of pleasant features, face. As it turned out, it was Baturin's wife. Not some kind of "temporary", but a real, legal spouse. I don't know how the battalion commander managed to "demand" her from Russia, but she was neither a soldier, nor, moreover, an officer.

We knew that many high-ranking commanders' wives, not being military men, shared front-line life and front-line dangers with their husbands. Many saw the famous film actress Serova in the car of Marshal Rokossovsky ... Only later, after the war, I found out that the wife of General Gorbатов was with her husband. Well, the conditions in which our battalion commander was, when the battalion fought only in company, also allowed him to keep his half with him. Yes, and I felt somehow more comfortable: now not only Rita and I were the envy of some officers. And Baturin began to treat us noticeably softer.

Meanwhile, the formation and preparation of the company went on as usual. We all understood that crossing the last major water line of the Nazis, covering their capital Berlin (and we did not expect another task and were right), would be the "last and decisive battle", since after completing this task we would hardly have enough forces with battles get to Berlin. And maybe that's why I will dwell in

more detail on the characteristics of the people with whom I had to go into this last, mortal battle. As I have already said, the machine-gun platoon at my company was

again formed by Georgy Sergeev, he was assisted by another platoon of the same machine-gun company, Senior Lieutenant Sergei Sisenkov. I have already written a lot about Zhora Sergeev, about his character. In battle, it seemed that he found the most dangerous places and climbed into them because no one expected him to appear there. And in this illogicality of his was the highest logic of survival in the war. He was not reckless in his courage -

he kept it on sober calculation and confidence, on tactical literacy. To match him were his fellow machine gunners, both Sergei Sisenkov and Piseev. Rather, they tried to imitate George in everything, not all of them, however, succeeded, but most often their actions were dictated precisely by this.

And I was glad to feel Sergeyev's reliable shoulder again.

Platoon and this time I was already known to the reader Zhora (Georgy Vasilyevich) Razhev, who has recently become somehow nervous, quick-tempered and does not immediately return to normal. His attraction to alcohol also became noticeable, which sometimes caused certain friction between us. This forced me to resort more and more often to my commanding measures and to reflections on the meaning

military discipline. Of course, I came to the conclusion that discipline, complete submission to the boss, no matter what rank he may be, is necessary. But not thoughtless, submissive (excluding one's own initiative), but with a soul, with a desire to do the task better, faster, more reliably, not in the name of the will of the commander, but in the name of victory over the enemy. Not willingness on the principle of "do with me what you want", but the willingness to do what is necessary in the name of a conscious need. In general, it was possible, although not easily, to manage the wayward Georgy

Razhev. Lieutenant Chaika, who had recently arrived in the battalion (I don't remember his name), was assigned to me as another platoon commander. He was a somewhat overweight, medium-sized, large-headed officer who seemed elderly to us (although he was then no more than 35 years old), with sparse blond hair and large receding hairlines, with blue, squinted eyes peering intently from under hanging thick eyebrows. His voice was muffled, as if not at all commanding, but his speech was calm, unhurried, which is why every word he uttered seemed carefully considered and therefore weighty, convincing. Behind his seeming inconspicuousness, both a sharp mind and remarkable determination were guessed. No wonder he was immediately elected party organizer of the company (the party organization consisted of permanent communists - commanders, foreman, clerk).

Together with him, junior lieutenant Semenov, I think Yuri, arrived in the company. His almost boyish, broad, snub-nosed face was profusely strewn with freckles, as if someone, indulging in mischief, had sprinkled his cheeks and nose with a brush heavily moistened with light brown paint, which had not been washed off since then. He did not yet have combat experience, and perhaps that is why in many of his actions there was uncertainty, although he did not show confusion in anything.

Captain Slautin Nikolai Aleksandrovich, who was in the position of commander of the 2nd rifle company, was appointed

my deputy (or rather, again, in Baturin's way - understudy). He was somehow short and round like a barrel or a two-pound weight, although you cannot call him fat. He gave the impression that he was cast from cast iron, especially his fists. Temper steep, laconic and rude. On occasion, when words were really not enough, he could give free rein to swearing and this, almost a pood

kulaks. He took little part in the formation of the company, although he was always in front of our eyes. I understood that he would not participate in the crossing of the Oder either, but was appointed only to replace me in case of failure. And in this case, I saw three such "exits": either to be seriously wounded, or killed, or, as for me personally, who cannot swim, drown in this Oder. My only wish was that Nikolai would not have to duplicate me.

Senior Lieutenant Kuzmin Georgy Emelyanovich was "seconded" to my company as the commander of the PTR platoon. With him, there were already three Georges in our company, and they began to call her jokingly "thrice Georgievskaya." He was only one year older than me, but looked much older, was, as they say, serious beyond his years, although he was

not a stranger to jokes. At that time I still had no certainty as to whether a platoon of relatively heavy weapons was needed when forcing such a large river. After all, the anti-tank rifle, according to the calculation, even had to be carried by two. But there was still time to think about it.

As always, former combat officers were appointed as deputy platoon commanders. I, unfortunately, do not remember their names, except for one. He was a large Georgian, with a kind of disarming smile, who had extensive combat experience. I almost remembered his last name, either Gaguashvili or Gogashvili. So he used to say that he had been fighting continuously for almost all four years, although he had been in hospitals three times (he joked like this: when Goga is being treated, Shvili is fighting, when Shvili is being treated, Goga is fighting). I also

remember one of the squad commanders - a former sailor, lieutenant commander named Radky. He was appointed commander of the department for his energy and, it seemed, a cheerful disposition. He constantly "poisoned" anecdotes, talked about his combat (and not only combat) adventures, in which, it seemed, both boasting and even untruthfulness were more than acceptable. But then I did not attach any importance to this, thinking that in a difficult moment his cheerful disposition would not fail. Unfortunately, this turned out not to be the case. But more

Soon, when the main combat crew of the company was completed and further reinforcements did not change it, an elderly penal named Putria arrived in our company. He was scary

thin, just emaciated. I was even surprised that he was not written off as a "citizen" by age, he seemed so old to me, although he was not yet fifty. In our long conversation, he said that he came to us after serving several years in prison for being from a big military head of a department of a food

warehouse near Moscow with the rank of quartermaster technician of the 2nd rank (there were such military ranks until 1943) went to conceal excess laundry soap, and the commission that checked the warehouse discovered an unaccounted for box, from which several pieces had already been launched "into circulation" - exchanged for bread for a considerable family of this Putri. Well, he received several years in prison, which were due for this according to the laws of war. Remorse for having spent almost the entire war in prison cells made him ask to go to the front. As he told me, it is better to die at the front in the name of the Motherland than to be considered a criminal who profited from the soldier's property. And finally, they replaced him with the remaining term by staying in a penal battalion. And before that, in

my company there were already several such "conditionally released" from prisons and camps. One of them, in general, still relatively young, not very emaciated (he was close to the kitchen in the camp), but who had not held a weapon in his hands for a long time, I took pity on and appointed the cook of the company camp kitchen. I was not embarrassed then by his arms, up to the elbows covered with dark blue tattoo patterns, and some of his prison-camp manners and jargon. He claimed that before being drafted into the army, he worked somewhere in the south as a restaurant cook and that he could cook decent food from ordinary soldier's products.

But then Putria appeared, with sad, somehow extinct eyes. His hands, thin as bird's paws, seemed to me incapable of holding even a light machine gun, not to mention a machine gun or anti-tank rifle. And I decided to appoint him to the kitchen instead of the tattooed one, so as not to expose his life to the dangers that lay ahead for all of us, and on top of everything, I felt sorry for him also because he, like me, could not swim, and we had to force the Oder. You should have seen how much hidden joy flashed in his sad eyes, how much hope lit up in his barely restrained happy smile...

And the one with the tattooed arms, when I handed him over to Chaika's platoon, could not contain his anger, and for the first time I heard something like a threat: "Okay, captain, we'll see who the first bullet catches up with." I never seemed to be a self-confident person. However, the absence of this quality did not prevent me from being resolute and persistent at the right moment. And this seemingly casually thrown phrase of his only strengthened me in the correctness of the decision. When you do business, make decisions and bear responsibility for them - there is no room for doubt. This is only later, in such cases, when the deed is done, you can analyze: could you do better, decide more correctly, did you "twist the string"?

In general, the main part of the penalty box, feeling the peculiarity of the upcoming hostilities, were concentrated and sad, even somewhat depressed by the uncertainty and the inevitable inevitability of the approaching danger at a time when the war that had lasted so long was coming to an end. This is natural. We all knew what "yesterday" brought us: many died, but we, the living, were lucky. But who knows what "tomorrow" will turn out for us? Yes, and we, the commanders of the penalty box, understood that with these people we would go together, perhaps to certain death. And the penalty boxers, of course, thought that their future depended to a large extent on me, on my combat commanding skills, while I thought almost the opposite: my life depends on how they will fight, with what degree of skill and consciousness of their responsibility they will perform combat missions. And that is why I paid great attention to the training of fighters in the possession of weapons, in their physical endurance.

Sad, frankly, thoughts occupied all of us, who were gathering and preparing for this last blow, as many then said, "for a free kick" against the enemy ... Among the penalty boxers, the former

captain, pilot, also with an unusual surname - Funny. It was a tall, calm, relatively young blond. I knew that his wife was somewhere nearby, in one of the large headquarters, as a cipher officer, and that their two children were left in the care of their grandmother in some Russian town.

Ridiculous ended up in a penal battalion because he, the commander of an air squadron, a combat pilot who already had three orders of the Red Banner of War, flying brand new fighters with a group of pilots through the air from an aircraft factory to the front, allowed a plane crash. One of his subordinates, either deciding to test the car in an illegal mode in flight, or simply not coping with it in the air, crashed it and died himself. Here the squadron commander thundered into the penal battalion.

In those extremely stressful days, Ridiculous infantry science diligently comprehended, training in dashes and crawls to exhaustion, as he himself said, "to a dull pain in overworked shoulders and buzzing legs." He was as persistent as he was patient. I wanted to know everything, try everything. Being in a platoon of machine gunners, he learned to shoot accurately from an anti-tank rifle, from a machine gun. Before everything he had to do. Everything, he thought, could come in handy in battle. He even managed to master accurate shooting from captured "faustpatrons" (or, as they began to be called, "panzer-faust") at a burned-out German tank. He seemed to be working around the clock.

His wife, also a captain, quite unexpectedly appeared in our battalion. After meeting with her husband, she, apparently keeping a tensely calm expression on her face, asked me in a soft chest voice for one thing: if her husband was injured, help him survive. For a long time, the impressions of this modest and wise woman who left her children somewhere deep in the rear remained in my memory in order to be as close as possible to their father and loved one at the front and to make her personal contribution to the cause of the Victory. "Here's my Rita," I thought

then ... Of course, such tension in those days

was only in my company, preparing for the upcoming battles. In the rest of the battalion, life went on more calmly, doing other things. For intense preparations for hostilities, time flew

by quickly. The company grew. Of its own composition, without attached platoons - machine-gun and anti-tank rifles, there were already about one hundred and twenty people in the company, almost forty penalized in a platoon. The tribunals did not sleep!

From dawn until dark we carried out strenuous exercises, shooting, marches. Warm spring days have come - overcoats, padded jackets and pea coats have already turned out to be superfluous, but they did not take off their kubankas, which many wore in a smart way, sideways. By the way

to say, both Baturin himself and his political officer, Major Kazakov, removed them only a few days after the Victory, when they were both summoned to the headquarters of Marshal Zhukov. Well, of course, almost all of us followed their example.

Here I must say that something happened to Georgy Razhev, and Baturin suddenly replaced him with Lieutenant Sergei Piseev, whom I knew as a sociable and good-natured guy.

I was glad about this, since I had conflicts with Razhev more and more often (later I found out the true reason for his "resignation", but more on that in due time). Now the company has ceased to be "thrice Georgievsky", but there are three Sergeys in its command staff. Soon a major

arrived from the headquarters of the division in which we were to operate. I don't remember the exact number of the division, but it was no longer the 23rd, in which we fought for Stargard and Altdamm, but it seems the 234th, but as part of the same 61st army of General Pavel Alekseevich Belov. We learned that a small group of them had already managed to "float" to the other side and conduct elementary reconnaissance. The group returned almost without loss, and the commander of this group, a sergeant, was presented with the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Our officers began to say that if they complete the task and remain alive, we will have our own Heroes. We already knew that for forcing such large water barriers as the Dnieper and Vistula, many were awarded this

high rank.

We were informed that on the night before the crossing (and when will this night come?), enough well-tarred boats, specially made somewhere not far in the rear, will be brought to the shore. The sapper battalion is engaged in these boats, which will, immediately after seizing the bridgehead, direct the crossing to it. Of course, my conscience again gnawed at me that I could not swim, but I was reassured by the fact that no one seemed to be going to swim across the Oder.

Although the spring was already gaining strength and the ice drift this winter passed in early February, the water in the river was very cold, a little above plus 5 degrees. And other data about Oder were not very encouraging. The depth is usually up to 10 meters, and now, when the spring flood has not yet ended, even more. The width on our site is 200 meters, the speed of the current is more than half a meter per second. Determining the required speed of the boats, we measured these 200 steps in steps.

meters on land and timed to determine how far downstream the boats could carry and what lead to choose. It turned out that 100-150 meters! But we were reassured by the fact that in our section the river flows along one branch and only after five kilometers its channel divides into two branches. In general, the approximate nature of

the upcoming task became more or less clear. I noted that the new moon is coming and the nights will be dark. My first knowledge concerning the Moon and the determination of its phases was once settled in my still childish brain, keen to perceive everything new, by my grandfather Danila, who was well versed in many folk signs and observations. But a meaningful understanding of these lunar phases and the ability, looking at today's Moon, to accurately determine in how many days the new moon or full moon will come and what part of the night, in the evening or in the morning, it will shine most brightly - this is already the merit of our topography teacher at a military school .

So, my assumptions boiled down to the fact that the most favorable conditions, if the command wants to take advantage of the dark night, will be in the period from April 10 to April 20. Soon, daily readiness was announced, and on the night of April 14-15, a company with all weapons, stocks of cartridges, grenades, dry rations on foot was advanced to the banks of the Oder.

Led the company, taking advantage of the darkness, the representative of the division, the captain, warning of complete "light silence". It was impossible to smoke or turn on flashlights even for the shortest moments, which this time, in addition to those that were given to platoon commanders, were given to all squad leaders. This was the first time in my memory, since it was assumed that all battle control signals, especially during forcing, would not be given by rockets, as usual, but by signal lights of flashlights that had green and red light filters. The missiles were also with us, but already for use there, on the ground, for which we have yet to cling.

We walked quickly, at the pace set by this nimble, thin, "quick on the foot" captain. There were no ordinary conversations in the ranks - everyone was silent and concentrated.

We had not yet reached the shore when some long structure appeared in front of us and our escort signaled "Stop" with a red flashlight. He asked me to assemble the platoon commanders and

by covering this long barn or warehouse, he allowed the company to smoke, disguising itself, as they said in such cases, "in the sleeve." He led us commanders to a trench not far away. There we were expected by a short

major, in an overcoat thrown over his shoulders and with a stick (apparently after being wounded), as it turned out, a representative of the division headquarters and another major, a battalion commander of "shooters", as we called rifle units and subunits. They explained that in this trench we now need to disperse the fighters of the company, and then we need, leaving heavy weapons here, to move from the hollow, which the guides will show, closer, behind this long structure, the boats on which we will, as that major put it, with a stick, "take the order". Boats to take at the rate of one for four. When I asked why the boats had not been brought here in advance, he replied: "Let their shells make holes, the Germans often hit our nearest rear with artillery." This was very quickly confirmed by the Germans themselves, inflicting a short but powerful artillery attack as soon as the company occupied the trenches. It's good that we had time, otherwise there, behind the shed, we could not have avoided losses. "Now the Fritz will be silent for three hours. This time should be used to carry the boats," the major added. They gave escorts for each platoon, and led their platoon units behind the boats. After an hour and a half or two, the boats were moved behind this long barn. But they were so

heavy that some of them had to be carried by six. I had to send for these remaining boats several additional groups of the most physically strong penalized. The battalion commander said that he had a duralumin boat with oars in store for me. Their sergeant went to reconnaissance on it and returned. She

happy.

I asked the local battalion commander to help me conduct a reconnaissance of the coast - both my own and the German one. Along the communication lines, and where they were bombarded with fresh explosions from a recent artillery attack (our coast was still very visible from the other side) - bypassing these places, crawling and along the funnels, we made our way into the first trench, dug almost directly on the coast, which turned out to be what -something hilly,

gently sloping in places, elevated in places. The long and high metal truss of a large railway towering in the distance to the left above the water immediately

bridge over the Oder. Judging by the map, the railway led to a rather large town, the name of which I forgot. I think it was Frankfurt an der Oder.

I thought that, having well processed the German defenses adjacent to the bridge with artillery and aircraft, it would be possible to quickly cross the Oder along this bridge and seize a bridgehead. The battalion commander, as if guessing my thoughts, remarked: "The bridge is heavily mined by the Germans." This means that there is no other way out - we have only one thing left: to force this accursed German river.

Having studied the terrain as far as possible, he distributed the trench into platoons and immediately made a decision: do not take a platoon of anti-tank rifles to the river, let him support us during our movement along the water from here, from this shore, firing at German bunkers and others firing points to be discovered. The same decision, after some deliberation, I made with regard to the machine-gun platoon. After all, its armament (machine guns of the Goryunov system, and one more "maxim") was also quite heavy and it is unlikely that our "dreadnoughts" will be able to withstand four people and machine guns afloat. Zhora Kuzmin, the commander of the PTR platoon, apparently secretly

rejoiced at this turn of events, although he did not show it. Yes, I think, if I was happy, it was not so much for myself as for the platoon: after all, the strongest and most enduring were selected for it. Sergeev, after a short silence, asked who would be my deputy instead of him and offered to take at least two or three machine-gun crews with me. And quietly, almost in a whisper, he added: "Have you weighed your decision well?"

I calculated approximately where we should land (if we succeeded), and was glad that my assumptions coincided with the calculations that were carried out at the division headquarters, since the site of the future bridgehead was determined for us downstream from where we were located, one hundred and fifty meters.

Based on this, the machine-gun and anti-tank platoons identified positions on the right flank, opposite the place where it was supposed to capture the bridgehead.

Due to the fact that my understudy was left at the headquarters of the penal battalion, and I left Sergeev on this shore, I appointed the commander of the platoon, Lieutenant Piseev, as my deputy for the duration of the crossing, all-

already having combat experience. The day was spent in the second trench. For the fighters, it was, so to speak, a "day of rest": those who were engaged in preparing weapons for battle, who managed to "compensate" for the previous and upcoming sleepless nights. We, the commanders, had more worries: he, this day, went to study our coast, determine the places where the boats should bring, the ways and methods of their delivery to the water, as well as the establishment of signals. We determined all this together with the major from the division headquarters. With the onset of complete darkness (relative, since some factory was burning not far from us, and the Fritz sometimes hung illuminating rockets high above us) at twelve o'clock at night, after another artillery raid, counting on the notorious German pedantry, the platoon commanders led their fighters for boats. The fighters of the machine-gun platoon and anti-tank missiles went with them, although they themselves did not need boats yet, but so that they would not have to make a second trip. And yes, you always need a spare.

By three o'clock in the morning the boats were on the shore, including the one that the major kept in reserve and which was intended for me. It was a really light duralumin boat, with good duralumin oars, in which that sergeant went on reconnaissance. "Heroic", in general, the boat, several bullet holes in it were well plugged and caulked. Combat boat. Some kind of certainty

she instilled in me personally.

Wooden boats, as I have already said, were heavy, probably not hastily made from well-dried boards (and where to dry them at the front!), but conscientiously caulked and tarred. The warriors carefully hid them behind the slightest folds of the terrain, hillocks and funnels. Taking advantage of the darkness, each "crew"

crawled out their section, determining which way to bring their boat to the water and launch it. There were no oars on some of the boats, and the available ones were not convenient, and therefore it occurred to many to use instead of them the small sapper shovels that everyone had.

Some feeling of either jealousy or envy stirred, probably not only in me. Again, the soldiers of the division remain behind, on the shore, but the penal officers again go ahead of them, ahead of them, to conquer "from scratch" the bridgehead from which the division

will be able to go to Berlin to end this long war. And we, most likely, will hardly be lucky enough to get to it. That scout sergeant got out on the enemy coast quietly, without revealing himself, and also left from there. And we keep fighting. But nothing, not the first

time! Let's hope we break through! At least some of the more than a hundred penal companies of the company will swim, and if they do, then they have not yet had impossible tasks. And let them capture a small bridgehead, but they will hold it to the last. There will be no turning back for the penalty box. Behind them, no land, no water. Everything is ahead. A loner will not be able to do anything here, it is here that "one in the field is not a warrior." But if at least one of the three platoons manages to catch on ... Then it will be possible to say: ours has taken it again!

The battalion commander of the "shooters", who stayed with us almost all day, on the eve (I never saw the regiment commander, although it was planned to capture the bridgehead for this regiment) handed over to me a radio station and two radio operators (soldiers, not penalized), who were supposed to be in my presence, without interruption, and transmit conditional signals about the progress and stages of the combat mission. I mentally already formed the crew of our "hero" boat: with me an orderly, two radio operators and another penalty box to help the radio operators and as a rower on a boat together with an orderly to row "four hands" - after all, you need good speed so as not to be behind the platoons.

The platoon leaders sent their liaisons with readiness reports. One of them reported, among other things, that my reserve was securely located in a solid dugout. Somehow this message resonated with my ear: I did not allocate any reserve. He asked what reserve he was talking about. It turned out that this was the detachment of that merry sailor and anecdotist Rareky from the platoon, which now instead of Razhev is commanded by Piseev. The department, formed at the suggestion of Rareky, mainly from former naval officers, on which I placed special hopes. Sailors are tough people! I ordered a messenger to take me to this dugout. And when he entered it and lit it with a flashlight, he saw the sailors huddled in it and their commander frozen in bewilderment and confusion. When I asked who assigned him and to what reserve, he began to lie inconsistently (it turns out that he deceived Seryozha Piseev as well). That's when with him

bravado flew off, and the mask of a merry fellow gave way to banal animal cowardice and impudent lies. Lies in war are completely intolerable and unforgivable. They often pay for it with blood, and, unfortunately, often not the liar himself, but others. When the

whole meaning of this came to the penalty box, one of them, whom everyone called "Sapunyak sailor", exploded: "Oh, you skin! .. - and added: - Comrade captain! Such bastards were shot on the spot in our fleet. Give me, We will deal with him ourselves." I realized that everyone understood the meaning of what happened: that they were almost used to cover up cowardice and betrayal of one reptile. I immediately took away the weapon from Rare, removed him from his post, and appointed Sapunyak, who was still trembling with indignation, in his place. Then he took his pistol out of its holster and ordered Redkoy to leave the dugout, not yet knowing what to do with him, with what memorandum and with whom to send him to the headquarters of our penal battalion - let the military tribunal deal with him. And it had to be! As soon as he

left the dugout, a German blasting shell exploded right above him and riddled him dead. "God marks the rogue," I remembered, and I was glad, firstly, that I didn't jump out first myself, other penal sailors didn't have time to get out, and now I don't need to rack my brains what to do with Rareky next These thoughts of mine may have been cruel, but that's how it was. Someone from the penalty box, coming out of the dugout and learning about what had happened, even said: "Dog death!" I did not pull this man up, let emotions come out. In this case, fate itself severely punished the actual deserter, who left the battlefield by cunning ...

Shortly after midnight, having calmed down a little from what had happened and from my next mistake in determining the true qualities of a subordinate, I sent the command through messengers to deliver the boats to the water.

My penalty fighters jumped out of the trenches and, taking advantage of the darkness of a moonless night, freezing under the deathly white fires of German lighting rockets, fleeing from fragments of enemy shells, rushed to their boats. Some of them already turned out to be damaged by fragments, and the soldiers immediately caulked them with some kind of rags, even cutting off the floors of their overcoats or pea coats.

During this time, we missed several people killed, a little more wounded, whom I ordered to collect in this ill-fated dugout. The boats were ready to launch, as expected, long before dawn. Once

again, through the messengers, I conveyed that we would start forcing five minutes after the start of artillery preparation on the intermittent green light of flashlights. Artillery preparation was to begin at 5.30 am. It was supposed to be short in order to have time to cross the river, and then the artillery fire would be transferred to the depth of the enemy defenses on a signal transmitted by us by radio. However, unfortunately, things don't always go as planned. How I prayed to fate that at least a light fog would form over the water, so that the Nazis would not be able to immediately discern the beginning of the forcing and conduct aimed fire. The artillery preparation began even before the pre-dawn gloom began to

dissipate. Its tight, powerful rumble seemed to cheer everyone up, and our first boats were already on the water. My warnings that the faster we move, the less likely the Fritz will hit us, although they were naive, unconvincing, nevertheless, the movement was noticeable. Yes, and the fog, although thin, loose, still hung over the river for a short time! This night was, it seems, the third or fourth after the new moon, and the defective moon appeared after sunrise. It was a lucky coincidence. German artillery and machine-gun fire intensified, noticeably

our anti-tank rifles and machine guns left on the other side also came to life.

By the way, at that time I could not understand why aviation did not support us. Only much later did I realize that all of it was working on the direction of the main attack of the Front - from the Kustrinsky bridgehead.

... Black icy water seemed to boil in places, absorbing both some boats and people floating separately from them. As it turned out later, some of the boats were so damaged or they were simply so heavy themselves that they began to sink under the weight of four people with weapons. And then, leaving only weapons in them, the penalists threw themselves into the icy water and swam, holding on to the sides of the boats, overcoming the cramps that cramped their legs in this cold font. I don't know how many passed this test, how many of them went to the bottom, but some of these brave people stubbornly moved forward, though with

a speed much less than we expected, and therefore carried them further downstream than required.

My tense consciousness fixed only those crews that, furiously exploding with oars, shovels and just palms and so seething from bullets and shrapnel, loomed in this faint haze. Some of the fighters were without caps, and not because they were hot - they simply let them in to caulk the holes in the boats that appeared again and again.

My light boat, with a small draft, was moving faster than the others, and, before reaching the shore, I gave a command to the radio operators to transmit a prearranged signal to the gunners to shift the fire. And at that moment it seemed to me that some kind of Fritz was firing aimed at my boat. The radio operator yelled, a bullet biting into his shoulder. An explosive bullet hit the surface of our duralumin vessel, and its fragments scratched the wrist of my left hand. From some boats, intense fire was fired at the approaching shore, one of them even fired a machine gun! But it seems that our boat is the first on the shore! Two or three boats,

already approaching the shore, but, thank God, not the one with a machine gun, were hit by shells before my eyes, and they flew into the air along with people. The Germans also fired with "faustpatrons". How many boats were broken in the middle of the river, I did not see, but several of them reached their goal, buried themselves on the shore, and the soldiers rushed forward, covering some of the chest, some of the stomach with shoulder blades like small steel shields, and firing from their machine guns. The first meters of the enemy coast became ours. But how few boats turned out to be on this coast, how few fighters landed from them! There are twenty people in total. And, looking back, I no longer saw even deserted boats, or people on the water. So it was everyone who got there. And the rest? Has everyone died? Not even a single platoon leader is here! What's up with them? But for two of them it was the first fight, but Serezha Piseev would be a good support for me, he already had combat experience. Jumping

ashore, I shout to the radio operator: "Tell us - we are on the shore!" But he answered: "I can't, the radio is damaged, there is no connection !!!" He grabbed a rocket launcher, fired a pre-charged green rocket high into the air - so ours must understand that we have reached, swam,

reached and are fighting for the bridgehead. Once again I regretted that for some reason our aviation was not working. I saw well that right bank, which had recently been the frontier of attack for us. So we should be well seen. Yes, this rocket should also serve as a signal for transferring the fire of the Soviet soldiers and machine gunners who remained there to our flanks and into the depths, from where, it seems, two or three German tanks began to appear. And here, on the left bank, events developed with lightning

speed. Not far from me flew, hissing and whistling, either a projectile or a Faust. And then, to my left, pilot-captain Smeshnoy ran swiftly to our right flank, shouting something in a sharp, breaking voice. I noticed Sapunyak, and even his tunic unbuttoned to all buttons, from under which one could see a sailor's vest. He ran forward, dragging not only other sailors, but also all the others who had already made it to shore. Some of the soldiers rushed after the pilot Smeshny. I ran after him too. Our two small groups rushed forward. I don't know, "hooray!" mouths twisted with anger and tension shouted, or a ferocious swearing was thrown out, but the penalists in hand-to-hand combat crushed the fascist barrier in the first trench they encountered, leaving behind them several wounded or killed brothers. And three or four more people fell, two or three meters before reaching the trench. Our pilot Funny, maybe even from the water noticed a German Faustnik and flew straight to his position. He, apparently not expecting such a frantic pressure and failing to hit a soldier running straight at him, jumped out of the

trench and took to his heels, but Ridiculous on the move caught up with him with a burst of his machine gun, and he, struck down, fell.

I fired a red flare and whistled the prearranged signal "Stop!" - it was necessary to let the fighters take a breath and change the already devastated disks of machine guns and machine gun magazines. Yes, and three tanks that appeared in the distance continued to approach.

In the trench, I counted thirteen people who finished shooting the fleeing fascists. Not much, but already at least a small piece of land on this enemy shore has been conquered! Now the task is to keep it with these small forces.

And then the counterattacking infantry of the enemy appeared behind the tanks! How many? Will we take it? And suddenly one tank stopped and began to smoke.

It turns out that this Ridiculous, having taken possession of the faustnik's arsenal, knocked out a German tank with a German grenade launcher. Amazing! Not in vain, it turns out that this brave pilot, during training in preparing a company for battle, actually riddled with fausts the skeleton of an abandoned German tank.

Almost without a noticeable pause, two more fausts hit the second tank. At first, his tower jammed, he got up and soon caught fire too. Our infantry who jumped out from behind the tanks, having managed to reload their weapons, were met from the trenches with dense fire, from which many Fritz fell, and the rest turned back.

And then, somehow spontaneously, almost simultaneously and without my command, the penalists rose from the trenches and rushed forward. The Germans fled. Many of them threw down their weapons, but no one raised their hands to surrender. They probably realized that it was unreasonable for these desperate Russians to surrender. And, in general, of course they were right. And suddenly, as soon as our hero-pilot ran past the Faustnik he had killed, he, who turned out to be either simply wounded or pretending, slightly raised himself, and in front of my eyes, discharging the horn of his "Schmeisser" right in the back of Funny, began to shoot until I finished him off, sending a long automatic burst into his red head.

He ran up to the pilot, turned him face up and saw blue eyes that had already stopped, in which the completely lightened sky was reflected - the sky that he loved so much and to which he devoted his entire army life. His chest was torn in the region of the heart and abundantly covered with smoking scarlet blood. For a second, I put my hand over his eyes, feeling the warmth of his forehead and eyelids already leaving. But I could not stop - I had to decide what to do here, now, immediately. Captured the second trench. Now there were twelve of us, I was

the thirteenth (not counting the radio operators who remained by the boat). Gave again the signal "Stop!" and already in a voice ordered to go on the defensive. It was decided to send a report to the battalion commander with signalmen, one of whom was not even wounded yet. Anyway, I don't need them without a radio station, but the hour is uneven, they will send a serviceable one. And, maybe, we will send two or three seriously wounded penalty boxers. In a hurry, he wrote in a note-report that "we occupied the second trench, we are defending as part of 13 people, we need aviation help. There is not a single commander

platoon. He appointed Sapunyak as his deputy. He died heroically, having shown courage and extraordinary bravery, captain-pilot Smeshnoy. "I wrote this because, in my opinion, he had already regained his title, atoning for his guilt with all his blood!

...Yes, it was a heroic time. Many years later, in one of the works of the famous Georgian writer Grigol Abashidze, he read that "... heroes, patriots make their time heroic." And here, first of all, Yanin, Smeshnoy, Yastrebkov and hundreds of other brave men were remembered. "And with cowards, traitors," Abashidze wrote further, "dark days are coming for the fatherland." In relation to the history of our SB, first of all, Hekht, Kasperovich and Rareky were remembered in this sense ... Although Abashidze had in mind other scales of betrayal.

Then he ordered to deliver two seriously wounded penalists to the boat in order to send them to the rear as soon as possible to provide them with the medical assistance they desperately need, otherwise they would not survive here. Before they had time to bring the wounded, as I leaned over to the radio operator to give him a report, suddenly (again suddenly!) I didn't even hear, but rather felt as if a huge gypsy whip clicked unnaturally loudly at my right ear and ... I instantly failed into a black pool without feeling its size. It was only later, when I regained consciousness, that I thought that they were writing a lie, that immediately at the moment of death or a moment before it, every person's entire life passes before their eyes. Nothing like it. In my opinion, I managed to immediately realize only one thing: I was killed. And that's

all ... As it turned out later, it was a bullet (I think, a sniper) that hit me in the head, which was later confirmed by a hospital certificate of injury, in which it was written: "Blind bullet wound to the right temporal region. Wounded in battles on the Oder River 04/17/45".

Apparently, the fighters who happened to be nearby, making sure that I was still alive, lifted me out of the water and, having hastily applied a simple bandage, put me in the same boat and pushed it away from the shore. Different people told Rita about my "death" like this:

Zhora Sergeyev, being himself already wounded and watching from the other side through binoculars our actions to seize the bridgehead, said this: "I saw very well. He fell into the water. He died ...";

my "kitchen" fighter Putrya: "Daughter, that's it: I saw it myself, he fell into water, he was dragged behind the boat."

After how long I woke up, I do not know, but the sun, which was already quite high, warmed well, and I felt the warmth of its rays. Maybe that's how he came to his senses. I wanted to look at the clock and saw that my hand was heavily bloodied, and the clock was damaged and stopped at the time of our landing. I realized that, judging by the already noticeably rising sun, two or two and a half hours had passed, which means that we had gone five kilometers downstream and were sailing close to the left bank.

The wounded radio operator, with one hand instead of an oar (they were lost somewhere) tried to direct the boat to the right bank. The second radio operator was killed, one of the penalty boxers had already died, and the other, wounded in the stomach, begged us to give him a drink and shoot him, since it would not be possible to save his life, and he did not want to die in cruel torment. I understood him, but I always remembered that "hope dies last" and you can't lose it even in the most extreme circumstances. As best I could, I persuaded him to be patient, especially since we would soon be on the shore, although he himself had no idea on whose side: his own or the enemy's.

My consciousness cleared up more and more, the swarm of black flies before my eyes decreased. It was useless to look at the map, since we had long gone beyond its limits, and the river bed clearly forked ahead. With difficulty, but I saw that we were approaching the right bank of the left branch of the river. So this is an island, maybe a small one, but whose is it? Is ours already or still in the hands of the enemy?

I had a trophy whistle with a miniature compass built into it. I looked mechanically at his arrow, but it added nothing to my assessment of the situation. Together with the wounded signalman, they somehow nailed to the shore and with incredible

difficulty pulled the bow of the boat onto the shore overgrown with last year's grass so that it would not be blown away by the current. I told the radio operator that I would go on reconnaissance, and he was ordered to guard the wounded penal, in no case give him a drink and, moreover, not pay attention to his other request. The soldier understood me.

I decided to go (or rather, crawl) to reconnaissance in order to find out whether the Oder and fate brought us to our own. The radio operator said that if he heard shots (and I decided that if the Germans were on the island, I would not surrender alive) -

so we're out of luck. And then his surest decision will be to swim further, where he will surely stumble upon his own. With great

difficulty, sometimes on the verge of losing consciousness, he crawled along this damp, overgrown with low shrubs and sparse, thin trees with freshly sprouted foliage. My whole body was on fire from a temperature that had come from nowhere, constant nausea overcame me. And God knows how much more time it took me to overcome some hundred meters that seemed very long, until I saw the parapet of a freshly dug trench. On it lay an inverted German helmet. Well, everything, I thought. Means no luck. However, he decided to keep moving forward.

While crawling, I noticed that the shells occasionally fly over the island in one direction or the other. This planted some hope in my inflamed brain. I took out my TT, checked the magazine, drove the cartridge into the chamber, and so, with the cocked trigger, crawled on. I decided that if the Germans were suddenly in the trench, I would put the first bullet in my forehead. Then I thought about it and changed my mind: no, the first one is still in the Fritz, whom I see, and only then the second - just like myself, so as not to be captured. The years of war brought up in me a categorical rejection of captivity as an alternative to death.

And now, three meters remain to the parapet of the trench ... two ... one and a half ... At the edge of the trench I already made out a German-style soldier's bowler hat ... but so far I don't see a German, whom I'll put down. A few more movements in the plastun style, and suddenly a hat with earflaps with our, Soviet, native red asterisk appears above the parapet! It was red, and not khaki, as it was more often at the front and became familiar. And then, as in a slow motion movie, such a glorious, narrow-eyed and wide-cheeked face of an Uzbek soldier, or a Kazakh, or a Kalmyk, or ... Apparently, he was terribly frightened by this face of a Soviet captain in bloody bandages, and even with a bloodied hand, crawling from the side of the enemy. In a moment, he rushed headlong along the trench, and with the rest of my strength I crawled onto the parapet and fell to the bottom of the trench, again losing consciousness.

I woke up because they were dragging me to some dugout, where an officer, also like me, with the rank of captain, ordered the nurse to bandage me. But while I was in a semi-delirious state, I told him: "First, find a boat on the shore, in it are seriously wounded officers (this

I called the penalty box an officer) and a soldier-radio operator. Help them!" They even washed me and safely, now they skillfully bandaged me.

The captain soon reassured me that both the wounded had been treated and that they had been sent by boat to the mainland. Soon they will send me too, but now it's impossible, the Germans are shooting through that place from their shore.

In the evening, when the sun had set behind the western bank of the Oder, the heat in my body became almost unbearable, and I was carried to the boat. I remember that a mustachioed foreman sat down with me, who quickly drove the boat with strong strokes. For some reason, this strip of water was periodically shot through by the Germans, and even one bullet slightly caught my leg. But I already didn't care. How

I was taken to some collection point for the wounded, I do not remember consciousness again left me. For some time I came to my senses when they were already sewing up a wound on my head in the hospital, and finally took possession of this constantly elusive consciousness when Rita found me here. How it all

happened can be learned from the already mentioned essay "Military Field Novel" by Inna Rudenko - there she described these events from the words of Rita. Here is this excerpt: She

was sitting in the battalion canteen, in front of her, as usual, there was a hill of herring - the guys always put theirs on her now, realizing how much she wants salt now - and tried her best not to fall. Don't drop dead. When I was going down the stairs here, not yet visible to all of them, I heard the voice of Zhora Sergeyev, with whom yesterday I said goodbye with Sasha - at dawn we had to cross the Oder. "I saw very well - he fell face down into the water. He died, he died ... But how can I tell her about this?" So that's why in the morning another friend - Muska Goldshtein

asked her for a gun, directly pestered: "Let me clean it, well, give it!" Just not to fall, not to fall down dead, not to go into the usual, so

understandable in normal life and impossible here, a woman's howl. After the wedding, she was so eager for him. She was not just Rita, she was a sergeant, and therefore she tried her best, leaving

the dining room, to step firmly and evenly. She got out and suddenly saw that replenishment was being loaded into the car, and with it - a spare commander (it was Nikolai Slautin, my "understudy". - A.P.).

To the front line. Instead of her murdered Sasha. And then she ran up to the car and, feverishly clinging to the side, began to ask: "Dear, my dear, good, take me, hide. I must see him for the last time." And they lifted her in their arms and put her in the center of the body and covered her with their bodies when the car flying towards the Oder passed under a hail of shell fire, mines. Everything on the Oder was on fire. And that shore, where, she knew, her Sasha had already

crossed, although he never learned to swim, and with him twelve fighters - all that was left of the company, and this one, where the whole earth was covered with craters from shells before her eyes.

At the very water, she saw Putrya, an old man whom she felt so sorry for - he got into the battalion for a missed box of soap - Sasha always left her in the wagon train. Putra cried:

"Daughter, that's it: I saw it myself, he fell into the water, he was dragged behind the boat." Dragged behind the boat? Why is he crying? This is at least some hope! AND she began to crawl under a hail of incessant fire, from crater to crater, and asked everyone who got in her way: "Have you seen the handsome, tall, black-moustached captain?" She spent two days and two nights in these

sinkholes. She could move faster, bullets, explosions no longer frightened her, but in every funnel, when they saw her, they moaned: "Sister, sister, bandage it!"

And she bandaged and crawled, and asked, and finally she heard: "Tall, handsome, with a black mustache? They took him to the medical battalion. But you are unlikely to make it in time - he is seriously wounded in the head." And then she ran, standing up to her full height, to the car in which the wounded were gathered.

And clung to the side again. But she could not ask for this car. The wounded, bleeding, even stood on the steps, and how many more of them, bleeding, remained lying on the ground ... But walking meant not having time, and then she grabbed onto the side of the car with her thin hands of a former student of the ballet studio, the thin hands of the blockade Leningrad girl. Strong arms of love. And hung like that for three long kilometers. In these arms, she carried for him from the battlefield not only herself - their future son,

who had already lived in her for several months,

to be born shortly after the Victory and the day when they signed "Alexander and Margarita Pyltsyn" on the Reichstag.

She searched in the medical battalion for a long time, because the handsome, black-whiskered one was not there. If she looked at herself at least through the glass, she would see that it was impossible to recognize her either: unexpected gray hair unrecognizably changes even twenty-year-olds.

She recognized him, bandaged like a mummy, by his lips. Lips, his lips did not respond to her kiss - he was unconscious. She spent almost two weeks in the hospital. They merged for her into one long, exhausting day without faces, strokes or details. But it was during these two weeks that she received her Order of the Red Star. I remember one thing - how I gave blood to someone. Direct transfusion. Only here, on the table, she lost consciousness. And in the evening he regained consciousness. And I wasn't surprised at all that she

was there. I probably woke up from the fact that she was bending over me and I felt the

look of her radiant gray eyes under the round arches of her eyebrows flying to the sides. Droplets of diamond tears trembled and sparkled on her large eyelashes. Her affectionate gaze was both joyful and anxious.

And, of course, it wasn't that I wasn't surprised at all, but then I thought: "How could it be otherwise!" Although I still didn't quite understand where I was and how long and miles away this meeting of ours, this hospital from that Oder, which became the grave for most of the soldiers of my company, who so desperately wanted to survive in order to wash off the shameful stain of a criminal record on the eve of the long-awaited Victory and again become full-fledged officers without the stigma of "penalty boxes". Yes, and this river almost became my grave.

Reasoning about the graves did not leave me for a long time. Of course, no one wanted to decay in a foreign land after their own death: neither a mound, nor a bush. Neither sit down with relatives, nor lay a flower, nor touch a blade of grass that has grown. It is almost the same as to perish in the watery depths of a foreign river. And I managed to avoid it. Fate. Happiness. Again incredible luck! And then, having learned how my Rita ended up here, I was

also not very surprised, rather, I admired her loyalty and courage shown by her in this difficult situation.

Here is how the Izvestia newspaper wrote about this episode of her war (January 17, 1986):

In those dramatic hours, having learned about the almost fatal wound of her beloved, a woman who was not just Rita, but a sergeant, rushed to look for him on the banks of the Oder, dotted with funnels, where everything was on fire. She spent days and nights in these sinkholes. She could have moved faster, bullets, explosions no longer frightened her, but in every funnel, seeing her, they moaned: "sister, bandage it!" And she bandaged and crawled ... Please note: she could move faster if she brushed off someone else's misfortune, someone else's pain: it's not up to you, they say, I'm looking for my own! No, this

she could not.

A few days later I was already getting up, and Rita, who had joined the endless rhythm of the hospital's work, now barely had time to run up to me.

Here, in the hospital, I was struck by the amazing vitality of one soldier, who was also wounded in the head. Neighbors on the bunks, on which the wounded were almost closely placed, drew attention to the fact that this soldier, without regaining consciousness, constantly, for more than a day, tapped with the fingers of one hand on the edge of the wooden crossbar of the bunks, as if he wanted to say something by this. . One of the wounded, apparently a telegraph operator, guessed that he was tapping the Morse code. And he deciphered this knock: he asks to accept the report. Then someone advised: let him know that the report was accepted, he might calm down. And he "tapped" on the fingers of this unfortunate man. And he really calmed down. And through

15 minutes later, his heart stopped beating. he lived all this time in the hospital with his mortal wound only for the sake of fulfilling his soldier's duty. Did it and died. What amazing strength of spirit kept him in this world! A few more days later, I began to persuade Rita to return to the battalion. Firstly, so that she would

not be considered a deserter (after all, she definitely ran away!), Secondly, to tell where I am and pass on a report from the bridgehead that was never sent, and thirdly, to find out how the case ended on such a high price the piece of land that we got behind the Oder, and fourthly, to come for me. I need to be in time for the capture of Berlin! I don't know how she got to the battalion and how she ended up in this hospital again, but we immediately went to the head of the hospital to ask for an extract.

Since Rita was already well acquainted with him (he only recently presented her with the Order of the Red Star), she boldly went to him, seizing me. He unexpectedly agreed, saying that he completely trusts me with such a nurse.

On charges - seconds! We went out into a sun-drenched yard, where there was some kind of elaborate four-wheeled carriage on springs with a young bay horse harnessed to it. And we, without wasting time, having received from the head of food for two days of bread and canned food, set off. This trip was amazingly enjoyable. I

didn't even remember if I ever had to move so freely, and even with such a charming coachman!

On the way, Rita also told the battalion news. The main thing is that they kept the bridgehead. After I was wounded, it turned out that two or three more counterattacks were beaten off, by evening the sappers had built some kind of floating bridge for the infantry and light artillery, and our heroic penal ten was joined by the replenishment with which Rita got to the Oder, and left by me on the right shore armor-piercers and machine gunners. Yes, and the units of the division, together with the penalized, began to expand the bridgehead we had captured.

Rita, when she returned from the hospital, at first they did not believe that I was alive. How dramatic it was, in my opinion, was successfully responded many years later to the publication in Komsomolskaya Pravda of I. Rudenko's essay "Military Field Romance" by the Tbilisi poetess Anna Funikova: ... She was told that her husband

died, and the Oder became his
grave; A cold, gray-haired
swell covered his corpse
like a wave. The wife did not
listen to her friends. "I don't
believe it. He's alive," she said.

Friends decided that she
lost her mind in grief. She
doesn't believe the news: she
doesn't have a husband, she
decided to find a loved one ... She herself is only nineteen years old
she carried her firstborn under her heart.
And my husband for many days in a row

she searched among the
wounded ... And it turned out
that the soldier was alive. No
wonder the heart prompted!
When she looked into the
mirrors, removing the scarf
from her hair, A strange

woman stood in the depths of the glass. Gray-haired... ...Some of her friends
whispered to her then that the funeral and documents on the presentation of me
posthumously to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union had already been prepared. I
had some kind of double feeling from this news: and it seems very pleasant, but
it's better, if I survived, then in my lifetime.

And if posthumously, then he is very worthy of this, although he is a penal,
Captain Funny! Let it be for the entire war in the combat history of our 8th penal
battalion the only, but indicative case of a penal Hero. By his heroic death, I
thought, he deserved this high title.

However, I was overwhelmed with joy not from this message, but from the
fact that I was alive and that my mother would not receive a third funeral for her
last son, that on this spring day, under the cheerful clatter of hooves, I was driving
along the road, in some places densely lined with flowering trees. Like last spring
in Belarus. Even more beautiful, probably because this spring, apparently, is
victorious! And in general it seemed at times as if there was no more war, such
grace!

Every now and then we came across groups of those liberated from captivity,
concentration camps and fascist slavery - men and women, and even children,
emaciated, emaciated, but with happy smiles and thawed looks. They waved their
hands to us and shouted their thanks. On some kind of pontoon bridge they
crossed the wide, now

calm expanse of the Oder. And I finally thought to ask Rita where we were
going, how and where we would find our battalion. She said that part of the road
was already familiar to her, and then she took out a map that Philip Kiselev, our
chief of staff, had given her. On the map, this thick red line marked (or, as the
military used to say, "raised") the route to some town. And there we will have to
ask the military commander for directions if we do not find our own.

I will not describe this whole long road, I will only touch on a few notable events on our way. We left the hospital, I think, on April 28, and by the middle of the day on May 1 we caught up with the battalion somewhere outside the city of Freienwalde, in one of the northern suburbs

of Berlin. In almost every house, and from almost every window, large white flags-sheets hung as a sign of unconditional surrender. A few children have already appeared on the streets, strenuously herded by adults into houses, as soon as our military vehicles appeared, carrying soldiers, and other equipment, and even more so - tanks.

Sometimes there were also large columns of monotonously shuffling their feet, dejectedly walking captured Germans under the escort of Soviet soldiers. The locals looked mournfully at these crowds. For some reason, I didn't notice a single case when some kind-hearted "frau" tried to give a loaf of bread or a potato to a prisoner, as it happened, even under the threat of escorts, when the Nazis drove our captured soldiers through Ukrainian or Belarusian villages. Well, well, each nation, as they say now, has its own mentality, its own breadth of soul.

In one place, near the road, some elderly German woman guarded several goats grazing on the first spring grass. Among these goats, Rita noticed a small, apparently recently born, nimble kid. Either the maternal instinct awakening in her spoke, or her amazing craving for animals, but she stopped our fiacre, ran up to this black creature and took him in her arms. The German woman guarding the goats was initially frightened when she saw a soldier in a skirt run up to this mini-herd. But then, probably seeing the happy face of this young Soviet woman with a noticeably stout figure, she understood her impulse and chattered: "Bitte, bitte, bitte," they say, please take it if you like. And Rita, happy, brought the little creature trustingly clinging to her and sat down with him in the cab. I was sorry to disappoint her, noticing that she could not replace his

mother goat, and then what she would do with him next. Most likely, just someone will then feast on a shish kebab from a young goat. In my opinion, even tears welled up in her eyes, but she understood me, carefully lowered the goat to the side of the road.

the road and touched our "cabriolet", constantly looking back at this sweet creature, which did not rush to its goats, but, as if for something native, for some time minced its thin legs behind the wagon that was leaving him farther and farther away. By nightfall, we

decided to stop in some small town. We chose a more or less decent house, the owners of which, I can't say very cordially, but, apparently, it was not the first time that we Soviets were let in

spend the night.

The room allotted to us had everything we needed: a table, chairs, two wide beds with thick downy feather beds, a basin stood on the bedside table, next to it there was water for washing in a metal jug.

We asked the hostess to boil water to drink tea. An elderly German woman with a kind of inanimate, dull face nodded as a sign that she understood our far from perfect German, squeezed out the "yawl" and left. Then, over the years of my service in Germany, I realized that this is "yavol" they have one of the main words of communication. In the meantime, we took out our provisions, opened a can of some American stew, took out sugar. The hostess brought us two cups of boiling water and, seeing sugar, asked if we would like coffee. From her eyes, so eagerly looking at these white pieces of chopped refined sugar, we realized that she offered coffee for a reason. Of course, we agreed, giving her half of the sugar we had. Apparently, she did not count on such generosity, since her previously motionless face suddenly perked up, and she, without ceasing, began to repeat "Danke, Dunk Sean" and even bowed somehow awkwardly. As we learned, the Germans generally did not see sugar for a long time, using ersatz, which were widespread then in Germany, in this case, saccharin. In the morning, when we were about to have breakfast, the hostess brought us two cups of steaming coffee. This ersatz coffee was very similar to that Far Eastern barley and acorn, from which in the famine year my mother baked black cakes or pancakes for us ... But still it was not water, but already a drink. Yes, even filed voluntarily and from the heart.

They thanked the hostess and left, having previously fed the horse with oats, which ended up in a box under the seat of the cab. Rita said that it was the guys who took care of her when she was equipped, Valera Semykin and Moses Zeltser.

All day long we met columns of captured fascists (how many of them surrendered?!) and crowds of those freed from slavery, then tanks and self-propelled guns, convoys with people and guns overtook us. And for some reason there was no revival among the soldiers, because they saw a girl sergeant carrying some captain with a bandage around his head, they did not shout, usual in such cases before, "air!", "frame!". Perhaps the mood was not right. Berlin still stubbornly resisted. And they went there...

The second night was spent in some small town or village (they were not much different from each other). The houses, with rare exceptions, were made of stone and almost all were covered with red tiles. The burghers lived well. But they wanted even better, and therefore they supported Hitler in his "Drang nah osten". Now it's time to pay for this

"drang". ... We woke up early and, having had a quick breakfast, immediately left. A few hours later we arrived at the final point marked on the map, and the first old German we came across indicated where the "commandant" was. Imagine our amazement when they saw our battalion officer, my old friend, Pyotr Zagumennikov, in his role! What a joy mutual was about this unexpected meeting! We stayed with him for two hours, refreshed ourselves with a second breakfast. Petya explained to us that he had been temporarily appointed commandant here and that he was to be replaced by a permanent commandant in the next few days. And then he will reappear in the battalion. Taking our map, Petya marked on it the points through which the headquarters of our penal battalion should

follow. Having replenished with the help of a good friend, the commandant, both our food supplies and food for our transport in one horsepower, we set off on a further, now not so long road. We decided not to stop for the night anymore in order to quickly get to our home, which was our "eighth separate" for us. The night passed under the monotonous,

soporific clatter of hooves, and in the morning, having reached the last village marked on the map by my friend, at its main intersection, near a small church, we saw on a neat German post with the same neat signs our Russian pointer, carved with an ax, on which large

Our field mail number "07380" was written in black ink, and just below it was written: "Baturin's X-th". There was no doubt. We're

almost home! And it was May Day! Double celebration in my heart! I immediately remembered the pre-war favorite song "Morning paints with a gentle light ..." about Moscow in May, and these memories of the distant past were mixed with ideas of a very close meeting with military friends.

... Berlin is living out its last hours, the battles are already going on for the Reichstag. The Germans have mourning on their faces, many have black bandages on their sleeves. Either by dead relatives - Wehrmacht soldiers, or by Berlin ... Or maybe they already knew about the suicide of Hitler and Goebbels, although we did not know about it yet ...

In general, we make our way according to the instructions in the northern suburbs of Berlin. Country places. Everything is green, the gardens are in full bloom. But the aroma of flowers is clogged with the smells of war: from the direction of Berlin, both smoke and the smell of gunpowder burning, and the characteristic sweetish taste of tol that exploded in shells or mines, are carried by the wind. Oh, those smells of war! How long will you follow us after it's over. Both in a dream and in reality ...

It is already well audible how the gun rumble rolls like a nearby thunderstorm. Wave after wave of planes are heading for Berlin. It won't take long for him to lash out. As we learned from Petit the commandant, the fighting there has been going

on since April 26th. Yes, you were long, hard, our way to the fascist lair. It is easy wins that make the winner arrogant. And for us, who have already won the near Victory by terrible losses, the greatest heroism, the exertion of all our strength and selflessness, we, the living, have only extraordinary pride. Pride that we finally succeeded, for the fact that our blood was not shed in battles in vain. From the first days of the war, we firmly and unshakably believed that "our cause is just, the enemy will be defeated, victory will be ours." And faith in the rightness of one's cause was the soul of our people. From it

came the general heroism of the Soviet people, mass exploits at the front and in the rear. And if earlier we confidently said: "There will be a holiday on our street", imagining it somewhere else

(by military standards) very far away, now this holiday, obtained by huge sacrifices of the people

ours, was already very close, its approach was felt, it seems, by every cell of the body, every particle of the soul, with every beat of the living metronome - the human heart. It was in such high

spirits that we reached the headquarters of our native penal battalion. My heart was pounding so fast that I had an unaccustomed, sharp headache.

The officers who were nearby saw us, rushed to our tarantass, literally dragged both of us to the sinful earth in their arms. Hugs to the crunch of bones, kisses, handshakes. Philip

Kiselev, who apparently noticed our fatigue (Rita managed to tell him that we had not slept all night, were in a hurry to get there), my pale face and perspiration that appeared on my forehead, ordered to leave us and let us rest. "All the news later!" he snapped. And he added: "Now, at his request, almost Lieutenant Putria will be your orderly for a few days." From this remark of his, I understood

that Putria had already been rehabilitated, although later I learned that Baturin had difficulty agreeing to this, motivating his persistence by the fact that Putria had not yet completed the month that he had to serve in return for unfinished years in prison. What "punctuality"! This happy "almost a

lieutenant" took us to the chambers allotted to us in the basement of some solid house. Here everything was tidy in a businesslike way, he also prepared clean towels for us to wash off the road, and as soon as we had done this, he served us dinner and two capacious mugs of milk. It turns out that he had already been waiting for our return for a day, was worried and busy, not finding a place for himself. Having had lunch and noticing that the headache had subsided, nevertheless, before going to rest, I decided to go to the battalion commander with a report on my return. And then somehow it will not turn out in a military way.

Baturin, like many officers, settled in the basement of a large house, although this basement was well finished and furnished and, apparently, served as a comfortable bomb shelter for one of the local aces. The

battalion commander received me cautiously coolly, listened to my official report on arrival and, without saying a word about the assessment of our actions on the bridgehead, ordered me to rest, and in the evening to come to him with my wife. Somewhat discouraged by such a cold

reaction to my return, I turned to the exit, hoping to hear at least something encouraging after me. But he left without waiting for a word - just like then, in the summer, when returning from the hospital. However, at that time he did not know me at all, but here we had so many contacts both on the Narew and after. Simply, I thought, he has such a strange manner of relations with his subordinates, well, in no way corresponding to my ideas about political workers, commissars, who he was quite recently. Rita was waiting for me on the street, both Zhora - Sergeev and Razhev and several other officers, among

whom was one of Kiselev's assistants, Captain Nikolai Gumenyuk, who was in charge of awards. He twirled, he seemed to want to say something, but he left without seizing, probably, the right moment. I did not fall asleep soon, but still I slept, my head was a little fresher. Rita was already preparing for an evening visit to Baturin's house: with the help of Putri, she

prepared my tunic, which had long been lying idle in the wagon train, stroked, hemmed a fresh white collar, ironed her tunic, putting on her order received in the hospital, and the medal that she was awarded beyond Altdamm. After all, after all, it is May Day, and Baturin, probably, on this very occasion, "gives a reception", since he invited us.

And many already knew that this reception, unlike the New Year's Eve, would be in a rather narrow composition.

When we arrived there, in addition to the battalion commander and his wife, there were political officer Kazakov and all the other deputies, almost all the staff officers, both Georgy (Sergeev and Razhev), as well as our battalion doctor and company party organizer Chaika, who, it turns out, was also wounded on the Oder, already on the water, but swam out, refused hospitalization and, like Zhora Sergeev, was treated by Stepan Petrovich. There was someone else, I don't remember, but the first toast, as expected, was made by the battalion commander.

He spoke for a long time, mainly about May Day, then turned to the recent events on the Oder. I learned that only four people remained completely unharmed from the penalty boxers who took the bridgehead, including Sapunyak, who replaced me after being wounded. How glad I was! Baturin said that all of them without "spilled blood" had already been restored to their ranks and returned to their unit or to the reserve officer regiment.

Summing up this part of his long, it seemed, and not at all table, speech, the battalion commander also spoke about those who were nominated for government awards. He began with the fact that Captain Funny was presented to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union (posthumously).

I then thought that Ridiculous showed truly heroic self-control, an amazing ability to control himself in a variety of conditions, including situations of mortal danger. This, in my opinion, is the highest manifestation of heroism. Right now, when I write these lines, the words that I

heard at one evening of front-line poetry in Kharkov are constantly knocking in my memory: Unrewarded soldiers lie in the ground. And for lifetime

awards, they simply did not have enough
life. How many of them,
sometimes unknown, heroes,
died without awards in

mother earth, both your own and someone else's?

Further, the battalion commander said that I was presented to the Order of the Red Banner of War and the assignment of the next military rank, in which "one big star will replace all the small stars on shoulder straps." Somehow he put it very eloquently. Kolya

Gumenyuk told me about this in a much simpler way a few days later ("confidentially"). At first, a submission to such a high rank was prepared posthumously for me, but as soon as Baturin learned from Rita, who had returned from the hospital, that I was alive, he immediately ordered this submission to be reissued "according to the desire of the company commander" to Smeshny. I thought: maybe the battalion commander had such an indication from above that a Hero could only be in the penal battalion posthumously? Or maybe Baturin did not want, as before, that someone in the battalion wore an award higher than his? (By that time he had already received the Order of the Red Banner. Probably, also for the Oder.) Then that evening,

after two or three toasts, something unexpected happened. Here I will again give the floor to the author of the essay "Military Field Romance" Inna Rudenko, who, according to Rita, wrote down the following there: Severe Sasha was

strong-willed, but somehow he almost lost
consciousness. It was after the injury.

They celebrated Sashino's return from the hospital, talked about how everyone missed him, how I looked for him and waited, what true love we have, and suddenly our friend gets up and throws right in the face of the two who spoke: "You don't even dare to pronounce their names! ". It turned out that these two, while Sasha was gone, had already agreed on who would be the first to try to "comfort" me. Sasha turned so pale that we barely had time to catch

him. And I, indeed, lost consciousness for some time from a suddenly arising monstrous headache. Probably, to this emotional factor was added the fact that I nevertheless "drank" (although not vodka or alcohol, but on the occasion of a happy "resurrection" they poured me, it seems, French cognac, which was not rare among trophies), despite to the strict instructions of hospital doctors. This friend turned out to be the same Georgy Razhev, who became more and more grumpy, prone to quarrels and scandals, who had already had enough alcohol before this Baturin reception. His morbid imagination, warmed up by wine vapors, fantasized some terrible picture from a misunderstood phrase he had heard, where it was about how they lament about what had happened and how best to calm, console a young widow in a demolition. During these last weeks, Georgy managed to arrange more than one scandal both among the officers of the units and at the headquarters. And all on the basis of "abuse". The next day he was no longer in the battalion. The decision of the battalion commander Baturin to second Razhev took shape a little earlier. Then, before the Oder, his sudden replacement by Seryozha Piseev, it turns

out, was connected with the letter

Razhev-father, a colonel who occupied some prominent post in the 5th Shock Army, advancing south of us, from the Kustrinsky bridgehead. The compassionate father, having probably learned from his son that he was preparing to force the Oder, sent a request to the battalion commander of the 8th OSHB not to send his child to the upcoming battles, so that, God forbid, at the very end of the war he, who already had both wounds and a severe shell shock, did not die. Of course, you can understand your father, every parent always wants, if there is such an opportunity, to somehow protect their blood. Well, here there was an opportunity: after all, according to the staff of officers, there were four companies, and only one went to fight.

This last trick of his, apparently, overflowed the patience of the generally phlegmatic Baturin, and Georgy was so urgently seconded to his father that by morning he was no longer in the battalion. He left without saying goodbye. It must have been embarrassing after all. Many years after the war, when I was looking for my brother-soldiers, or rather "one-single battalion" friends, I found him in Penza, and almost until his death we corresponded. Still, the joint front-line life and the dangers experienced bring them closer together than they share cases like that May Day scandal near Berlin. Then his letters stopped coming, and a few years later my request to the military registration and enlistment office received an answer: "Retired captain Georgy Vasilievich Razhev died on May 14, 1993 and was buried on the Walk of Fame in the city of Penza." Probably, after all, then (in our SB) he had breakdowns, and he lived the rest of his life with dignity. In those days, the battalion headquarters changed its location several times (and everything

around Berlin). Our units were no longer sent into battle, although the replenishment of the penalty box still arrived. The war ended, but, as if by inertia, the tribunals continued to work.

My faithful Putria touchingly, with tears of sincere regret in his eyes, said goodbye to us and left at the disposal of the Personnel Department of the Front already as a lieutenant (I even presented him with my epaulettes, removing extra stars from them). And there he, probably, immediately (or shortly after the Victory) was fired into the reserve. And I was glad that I had a hand in keeping him alive, otherwise he would hardly have survived on the Oder.

That my orderly that I had on the Oder died on the bridgehead. Putria completed his penal battalion term. And now, by order of the battalion commander, newly arriving penalists were appointed orderlies to officers, and without units. An artillery captain Sergei was attached to me (I don't remember the exact name, I think it was Kostyukov). He was a Muscovite of medium height, with delicate features that betrayed in him a hereditary intellectual. He played the piano beautifully and was generally a musically and literary educated person. I just don't remember what he did wrong just before the end of the war. It so happened that this replenishment did not have to go into battle, although, despite this,

they had six to seven hours of combat training every day. And their fate has developed in such a way that, probably,

all of them were soon amnestied on the occasion of the Victory. Sergei left me his Moscow address. And on my first vacation at the end of 1946, when Rita and I, traveling through Moscow to the Far East, first got to the capital of our Motherland and saw the Kremlin, the Mausoleum, Red Square for the first time, we nevertheless chose the time to visit the cherished Moscow address, however Sergei was not found at home - he continued to serve somewhere not far from Moscow. But the meeting with his relatives, to whom, it turns out, he told about us, was cordial and pleasant.

Berlin fell on May 2! Some week remained before the final Victory, and on May 4, Baturin and Kazakov somehow obtained permission to make a trip to Berlin, to the Reichstag.

And again, as in Rogachev, Brest and Warsaw, we did not participate in the assault on Berlin, but only somehow ensured this assault at the cost of many lives. As in Warsaw, so now they entered Berlin into a still

burning city ... We drove along the Berlin streets for a long time, winding through them due to the fact that in many places they were littered with fragments of destroyed houses, lined with tanks and guns. The impression of this capital of the fascist Reich is gloomy. And not only, and maybe not so much from the destruction and other traces of the war. Most of the streets are somehow boringly straight, and in general the

layout of the city seemed tediously correct. ... Many buildings frown with half-sighted or broken windows, from which white sheets hang instead of flags of surrender. But this is from where the windows have either survived, or they have already been plugged up with something and life is felt there. Many doors have been torn down, along with part of the adjoining walls, and the houses are snarling like the toothless mouths of

decrepit old men. The surviving walls of the houses are uniformly dirty, some kind of gray. From time to time people appear on the streets or look out from the rare windows of houses, at first glance they are also monotonous, equally shabby, or something. Most of them are women, very old people and curious, like all peoples, children. In some places, there are also survivors, but hiding in the basements of destroyed buildings, or old people - "Volksturm", or boys from the "Hitler Youth" with

But they hoped to defend their "thousand-year-old" Reich on the verge of death. Many of them laid down their heads for the crazy ideas of their possessed Fuhrer. And these were hiding in order to wait out, change their military uniform and get lost in the mass of civilians.

I remember we drove up from the river Spree and ran into the collapsed trusses of the bridge across it. They did not look for a detour, but climbing these farms, the lower part of which was submerged in places in water, they crossed to the other side, right on the square in front of the Reichstag and approached it. In some places, from the broken large windows of this gloomy building, smoke still curled and burned. And no majesty! A red flag flies over the ruined skeleton of the former glass dome - our Soviet flag! But this is not just a flag, this is the Banner of Victory! The wide staircase of the main entrance and numerous columns are beaten, dotted, as if pockmarked, with traces of shrapnel and bullets.

Our small group was met by a young lieutenant, with whom battalion commander Baturin talked about something. After instructing us to wait, he went inside with this officer. Soon the lieutenant returned and allowed us to enter. At that time, there were very few people in the hall where we entered, and our battalion commander was standing not far away with the same short stature, but, unlike the round Baturin, he was a lean, thin colonel, and he, gesticulating vividly, was talking about something .

As I later learned, this colonel was the commander of the regiment that stormed the Reichstag, and is now appointed its Military Commandant. The quirks of fate

brought me together with him more than 30 years after these days, when I, being the head of the military department of the Kharkov Automobile and Road Institute, conducted military training for students at one of the military units in the Ukrainian city of Cherkasy. And there, before the students took the military oath, I was recommended to invite the Hero of the Soviet Union, Colonel Fyodor Matveyevich Zinchenko, to this solemn ritual.

Something very familiar seemed to me in the features and gestures of this colonel, and when he introduced himself as the commander of the regiment that stormed the Reichstag, I immediately recognized in him that first Soviet military commandant of the Reichstag. A few years after this meeting in

Cherkassy, I happened to meet this extraordinary and interesting person, and each of us had something to remember from those terrible events. And then, in the forty-

fifth, when we entered the Reichstag, its walls, columns and other architectural details, partially destroyed, sooty, just two days after the capture of the Reichstag were already painted with both short and lengthy autographs of Soviet soldiers, even at a height accessible only to a gigantic man. And they were written with chalk, and fragments of bricks, and burnt

firebrands.

Petya Zagumennikov and I (he returned to the battalion the day before) dragged some fragments of concrete and burnt boxes to the wall, I climbed on them, and Rita and Peter supported me from both sides so as not to fall off. And with some kind of charred stick he wrote: "Alexander and Margarita Pyltsyn. Far East Leningrad - Berlin." And a flourish for two. (I note that then Rita was still Makarievskaya.)

We stuffed our pockets with fragments of plaster, fragments of stones and bricks as souvenirs for ourselves, and for those who did not happen to go with us to the Reichstag, and for posterity. It's a pity I didn't save them, not that spoon mutilated by the bullet, not even the bullet taken out of my buttock after the war, a year after being wounded near Brest.

For some reason, at that time there was no particular desire to keep this material memory of the war. She was remembered by her wounds, and not only bodily, but also of the heart, of the soul. And it seemed that this memory is quite enough for the rest of his life. And sure enough, if I am writing this book almost 60 years after those fiery years, days, nights. ...By

evening they returned. I must say that two days ago Rita found a white rabbit somewhere and sheltered him with us. And wow, he turned

out to be so tame that he immediately got used to her hands and, probably already accustomed to that, liked to drink beer, which we had enough. In the morning, this fluffy animal climbed onto the back of the bed in order to sniff under the feather bed at a convenient moment. So, when we returned

from Berlin, our nimble rabbit sat motionless under a chair, and a long

thick pasta. Apparently, he found her and began to gradually swallow until she rested somewhere inside him. Rita was frightened, took him in her arms and carefully removed this pasta. How merry this amusing creature! And when my new orderly Sergey Kostyukov came to play the piano, Rita put this animal on the edge of the keyboard, and he "listened attentively" to the sounds. At the end of the game, seeing some kind of bait on the other end of the keyboard, he jumped over the entire black and white track with a key, causing almost chord sounds. In general, the expectant mother had fun

with him, as with a child. By the way, when the baby born to us shortly after the Victory grew up a little, his first favorite live toy was also a rabbit and also white, fluffy. From day to day we were waiting for the surrender of Germany,

and then I remembered that long ago, back in 1944, I wrote a poem in which there were the words: "and in the spring, in early May, the Victory Salute will thunder over the earth!". And spring is already in full swing, and the beginning of May has already been marked, but there is still no Victory ... Our assistant chief

of staff Valery Semykin brought headphones from the radio station on duty around the clock to Baturin, his deputies, Kiselev, to Rita and me and to someone else. Radio operators should turn them on as soon as a message about Victory appears. And this

moment came on the night of May 9! Shortly after 12 at night, a signalman suddenly flies in to us and shouts: "Victory, surrender, hurray!" Before we had time to get dressed, the Victory Salute was already thundering on the street. People rushed to each other, squeezed their friends in their arms, kissed, many cried, not embarrassed by tears of joy. Everyone fired, some from pistols, some from machine guns and machine guns. In my opinion, even loud shots from the PTR were heard. Hundreds of various calibers, both serial, and colored, and even smoke rockets soared into the sky, which were also clearly visible in the sky illuminated by this fireworks. Tracer bullets traced the sky from edge to edge. There was nothing to save now! I then thought: where do the bullets fall? After all, no matter what bottomless sky they are released into, they still fall on the ground, although German, but densely populated by people. And how do they, falling at great speed, bypass those who launch them upwards, and in general any, including peaceful Germans? (

from this fireworks, on this first sleepless night of the world, someone died, as in a war. Closer to

dawn, having spent almost all the stocks of fire weapons, they began to gradually gather at the headquarters. Baturin and Kazakov came out, congratulated everyone on the end of the war, and the battalion commander announced that at 12 noon Moscow time there would be a gala dinner in honor of the Victory for the entire battalion at the local stadium. It was even ordered to arrange a table for the penalty box.

Everyone somehow suddenly looked younger, and on the occasion of the Victory, our doctor Stepan Petrovich Buzun even shaved off his old-fashioned beard and, to everyone's surprise, turned out to be not at all an old man.

Everyone spoke. Some briefly, some verbose, but in the words of each there was the joy of Victory, and the pain of loss, and faith in a long peaceful future, and hopes for a bright, happy tomorrow. And each speech ended with a toast, and it was considered a good sign to accompany each toast with a full cup. Apparently, having foreseen this, they put not glasses and mugs on the table, but peacefully - glasses (and where did they get so many of them?). But nevertheless, many of what is called "lucky". Apparently, Baturin also "relaxed" well, if he suddenly called me aside and "confidentially" told me what I had been talking about for a long time guessed.

It turns out that then, on the Narevsky bridgehead, General Batov seemed to have ordered my company to attack through a minefield. And although I had long been convinced of the validity of my guesses and the thought drilled into my head whether it was at the suggestion of Baturin himself that General Batov had made such a decision, this message stunned me and again I was seized by a state of strangely acute headache and some clouding in the eyes. And again, I considered the reason for this a few drunk cups, although Rita strictly watched that no one poured me vodka, or, especially, alcohol, and poured me some kind of weak wine herself, which our Stepan Petrovich carefully supplied her with.

We, front-line soldiers, often, even before the Victory (and now even more so) tried on a possible post-war time, drawing it in the most iridescent colors. But the main thing is that everyone dreamed of returning to their native land as soon as possible, "under the roof of their house." Even now, after so many years after that memorable Victory Day, we are even more often trying on the present to our past. And so many coincidences in our destinies: and children

raised, and grandchildren, and great-grandchildren nursed, and post-war affairs did not lose face ... But, probably, there are even more discrepancies. Especially after in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, already without a fascist invasion, our Great United Motherland was destroyed, fragmented, for the sake of which, for the sake of its honor, for the sake of a free life and deliverance from fascist slavery, many and many human lives and destinies were sacrificed.

So, the insanely long, terrible war ended. What's next? How will fate turn out? Not everyone will go home, the army is still needed. Some of the officers (and we now have almost all officers in the battalion) will have to continue their honorable military service. And the headquarters of all ranks have already received orders and orders to prepare the appropriate submissions to the officers: who to fire, who to leave, and who else to win the Victory over Japan!

Many years later, in the very famous film "Belorussky Station", Okudzhava's song about the "Tenth Airborne Battalion" sounded, which we, the former penal battalions, accepted as our own - about our Eighth Separate Penal Battalion, and to

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Victory, when I managed to find and gather a dozen fellow soldiers in Kharkov, we sang this song somewhat altered by me as our own. And there were such words: "A separate, our Osipovsky bold battalion is leaving at night for Rogachev." And behind the words "We need to get a victory, one for all, we won't stand up for the price" was our verse: In the attacks of those

deadly and mat, and wheezing,
and a groan, then a
separate desperate, iron battalion goes
hand-to-hand. And then, according
to the combat path of the 8th OSHB, the words went: From Kursk to the
Dnieper, to the Vistula through Brest, to Narew
and Oder, we walked, carried our cross. Although
someone is buried somewhere,
but even now we are
invincible, and we all need a victory
that washed away the guilt with blood, we will
not stand up for the price. The
shrapnel whirlwind is powerless, and it is incapable

put up a barrier there, where our separate
Eighth officer battalion was marching.

And then, already by the 50th anniversary of the Victory, when grief for our Great Motherland, the USSR, lost in Belovezhye, was sharp and deep, the following lines formed by themselves: Victory

50. More years will pass ... We
will never lose the honor of an officer! In the
declining years, the troubles of the
former Fatherland have come
to us no more. The Victory won
at such a price was crucified, betrayed, a pale
trace remained ... And now the term is deadly,
for many it was the last. And, alas,
we can't collect you, our separate
penalty area, our veteran battalion! And

then, back in May 1945, as soon as the war ended, I learned that in the course of certification for my future fate and military career, battalion commander Colonel Baturin, giving a generally very positive description of my fighting qualities, did not fail to prick me with the fact that "there is no close connection with the Red Army masses", meaning, probably, that I tore off part of my time from this same "mass" for my wife. But after all, it was me, and not his penalty boxers, who called the warm word "dad". And he came to the following conclusion:

Brave, courageous. He reads the battlefield well, endures difficulties easily, and is physically enduring. Interaction in the unit and with the means of strengthening can organize, is morally stable, works hard to improve his theoretical knowledge. It is advisable to leave in the cadres of the army in the position of commander of a rifle battalion. So my future was already predetermined, although

Baturin did not bother to listen to my opinion. Yes, I'm not offended, since his recommendation to leave me in the army, in general, impressed me. Even when I, a young Red Army soldier, was sent to a military school, I said to myself: "So, serve me like a copper pot!" So I served all forty calendar years - from 1941 to 1981 faithfully and honestly.

I think those of the readers who are interested in the milestones of this long military service of mine, and the people with whom I had to meet by the will of fate, will be patient and finish reading the last chapters of my book. And besides my immediate and direct superiors, I had a chance to see Georgy Zhukov, Semyon Budyonny, Vasily Stalin, Marshal Rotmistrov, cosmonauts German Titov and Georgy Grechko and many others, to whom I will devote several pages. But this is in the final

chapters, but for now there is a chapter about what happened to us in the first months and years after the war, how my post-war service took shape and our family, born in the fiery years, was cemented.

...So many years have passed since the fiery days and nights of a war on a scale never seen before in the history of mankind died down. Most of my comrades-in-arms, with whom we went into heavy battles, front-line friends, with whom for a long time and stubbornly, together with all the Soviet people, went to such a difficult and difficult Victory, unfortunately, they will no longer see this book. And I dedicate it to all of them. And, as I promised in the introduction, I will enumerate all whose names I remember in a kind of memorable list, which completes this chapter. For one of the main tasks that I set myself before writing these memoirs was to leave their mark in our history, their deeds and exploits.

Together with those whom I managed to find forty years after the Victory, we remembered the names of many, but, unfortunately, not all, and I collected far from complete data

about them. But let at least only their names reach their descendants, and let them remain not nameless heroes of that war. They deserve to be remembered, because each of them invested a particle of his life, and someone and his whole life, in the cause of Victory. The war

caught up with many of them years later. 1. Afonin Alexey Antonovich. Born on 05/07/1919 Senior lieutenant. The commander of a platoon of machine

gunners. Lives in the Novosibirsk region. 2. Babich Anatoly Grigorievich. Major. Head of ammunition battalion. Died 04/23/1983

3. Baturin... Colonel. The commander of the penal battalion from August 1944. After the war, he lived in the Moscow region. Died in 1983(?)
4. Beldyugov Ivan Ivanovich. Major. Rifle squad leader.
5. Boyko... Captain. Commander of a company of anti-tank rifles. He died in November 1943.
6. Stepan Petrovich Buzun. Medical captain. Head of the medical center of the battalion.
7. Bulgakov Dmitry Ivanovich. Born December 24, 1918. Lieutenant. Rifle platoon leader. Dropped out of the ShB due to being wounded on 10/24/1944.
8. Glukhov... Captain. Authorized Special Department "SMERSH".
9. Goldstein Moses Iosifovich. Born on 05/03/1919. Captain. Mortar platoon leader. After the war, he served in the troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, lieutenant colonel. Died in Kyiv on December 4, 1999.
10. Gumenyuk Nikolai Dmitrievich. Born in 1919. Captain. Assistant Chief of Staff. Died in Kyiv in 1972.
11. Davletov F... Senior Lieutenant. Rifle Commander platoon. Died on the Narevsky bridgehead (Poland) 10/24/1944
12. Ivan Demenkov... Senior lieutenant of the medical service. Paramedic of the battalion first-aid post.
13. Zheltov... Major. Party organizer of the battalion. Killed during a raid behind enemy lines near the city of Rogachev on February 21, 1944.
14. Zagumennikov Petr Ivanovich. Born on 09/04/1924. Major. The commander of a platoon and a company of anti-tank rifles. After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Lieutenant colonel. Lived and died in Poltava on 20.06.2001
15. Zeltser Moses... Captain. Head of the food service of the battalion.
16. Zorin Pavel Ivanovich. Senior lieutenant. Platoon commander connections. Battalion Communications Officer.
17. Izmailov Ivan Petrovich. Born on March 23, 1906. Major. Assistant battalion commander for supplies. After the war he lived in Uzbekistan.
18. Cossacks... Major. Deputy Battalion Commander political parts.
19. Karasev Ivan Andreevich. Born on November 10, 1918. Junior lieutenant. The commander of a platoon of machine gunners.

20. Kachala Vasily Moiseevich. Born on March 13, 1921 Captain. Rifle platoon leader. After the war, he lived in the Krasnodar Territory. Died 07/03/1988

21. Kiselev Philip Andreevich. Born on 08/18/1923 Major. Platoon commander, PNSh-1, battalion chief of staff. After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Major General. After his dismissal, he lived and died in Moscow on January 29, 1996.

22. Kudryashov Alexander Ivanovich. Born on September 11, 1913. Lieutenant Colonel. Deputy battalion commander (until May 1944). After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Colonel. Lived in Ufa. Died 05/12/2000

23. Evgeny Kuznetsov... Lieutenant. Platoon commander submachine gunners.

24. Kuzmin Georgy Emelyanovich. Born on 06/08/1922 Captain. PTR Platoon Leader. After the war he continued his military service. Major. Lives in Novosibirsk.

25. Kostik Stanislav Ivanovich. Born on March 10, 1921. Senior Lieutenant. The commander of the infantry, then the commandant's platoon. After the war he continued his military service. Major. Lived in Minsk. Died in 1992.

26. Lozovoy Vasily Afanasyevich. Born on 03/01/1921 Major. Battalion Chief of Staff (until August 1944). After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Colonel. Died in Kyiv on June 24, 1993.

27. Matvienko Ivan Vladimirovich. Born on February 28, 1921 Major. Commander of a rifle company, from October 1944 - deputy battalion commander. After the war, he lived in the Kirovograd region. Died 12/8/1991

28. Mirny... Lieutenant. Political worker. 29. Nazykov

Vasily ... Sergeant, then lieutenant. Head of Secret Office. After the war, he served at the headquarters of the GSOVG, Berlin. 30. Nosach Vasily Antonovich.

Major. Chief of staff of the battalion until November 1943. After the war he lived in the Kyiv region. 31. Olenin... Major. Party organizer of the battalion.

32. Osipov Arkady Alexandrovich. Born on 04/23/1908. Colonel. The commander of the penal battalion from the moment of its creation until August 1944. Honorary citizen of the city of Rogachev. Lived there. Died on January 15, 1995. 33. Fedor Ilyich Pekur. Major.

Commander of the mortar company. 34. Piseev Sergey Alekseevich. Born on 09/02/1923 Senior lieutenant. Commander of a machine-gun platoon and a platoon of submachine gunners. After the war he lived in Odessa. Died 03/01/1991 35. Poltsyna Margarita Sergeevna. Born on 06/06/1925

Senior Sergeant. Nurse and medical instructor of the battalion. She died in Kharkov on 12/12/1996. 36. Pusik Konstantin Danilovich. Captain. Head of the financial service of the

battalion. After the war, he lived and died in Moscow on June 24, 1985.

37. Razhev Georgy Vasilievich. Born on September 15, 1920 Captain. The commander of a platoon of machine gunners. After the war, he lived and died in Penza on May 14, 1993.

38. Ruined... Captain. Rifle platoon leader. 39. Rudzinsky ... Major. Deputy Battalion Commander political parts (until August 1944).

40. Yuri Semenov... Born in 1924 (1925?) Lieutenant. The commander of a platoon of machine gunners.

41. Semykin Valery Zakharovich. Born on February 23, 1920 Captain. Communications platoon commander, PNSh-3 battalion. After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Lieutenant colonel. Lives in the Khokholsky district of the Voronezh region. Honorary citizen of the region.

42. Sergeev Georgy Timofeevich. Born in 1921 (?). Senior lieutenant. Machine gun platoon leader. After the war he lived in Tula. Died in August 1974. 43. Sisenkov Sergey Timofeevich. Senior lieutenant. Commander machine gun platoon. Died 1953

44. Slautin Nikolai Alexandrovich. Major. Rifle squad leader. After the war, he lived in the Semipalatinsk region. 45. Smirnov Petr Vasilyevich. Captain. Platoon commander of anti-tank rifles. Died 03/03/1975 46. Sokolov... Senior Lieutenant. Staff officer.

47. Syrovatsky Mikhail Iosifovich. Born in 1911 Major. Rifle squad leader. He died in 1945. 48. Tavlui Pavel Semenovich.

Born in 1915 Major. Rifle squad leader. 49. Tachaev Boris... Captain. Head of the

weapons workshop. 50. Usmanov Fuad Bakirovich. Born on August 14, 1922. Captain. Rifle platoon commander, PNSh-4. After the war, he graduated from law school. He was the Chairman of the Supreme Court of Bashkiria. Died in Ufa on January 18, 1966.

51. Filatov Alexey Grigorievich. Born on February 22, 1915. Lieutenant Colonel. Deputy battalion commander. After the war, he lived and died in Moscow on July 6, 1998. 52.

Mikhail Filatov... Lieutenant Colonel. Deputy battalion commander until October 1944 53. Tsygichko

Vasily Korneevich. Born on 11/28/1921 Major. PTR company commander, then PNSh-2. After the war he continued to serve in the Soviet Army. Lieutenant colonel. Lived and died in Kharkov on 08/06/1994.

54. Seagull... Born in 1913(?) Senior Lieutenant. Commander a platoon of submachine gunners and a company party organizer. 55. Chesnokov Stepan...

Captain. Headquarters Commander. 56. Shatov... Captain. Head of clothing supply of the battalion. 57. Shamshin Alexander Petrovich. Born on December 29, 1923. Captain, commander of a rifle platoon. Died in August 1961. 58. Yakovlev Konstantin... Captain. mortar commander platoon.

59. Yanin Ivan Georgievich. Born in 1924. Senior lieutenant. Infantry platoon commander, deputy company commander. Died on the Narevsky bridgehead (Poland) 10/30/1944

May the eternal memory of those who are no longer alive serve as a tribute of appreciation and gratitude for their exploits in the name of love for their Motherland in those distant but unforgettable years. And I want to wish the descendants the same boundless love for the land of their fathers and mothers, the same readiness, if necessary, to defend it, which their predecessors had during the Great Patriotic War.

Chapter 11

The first days of the world. Mystery disease. Order history. Train "Berlin-Moscow". Rembertow, hospital. Accurate diagnosis. An evening of dancing. The birth of a son. Leipzig impressions. My new bosses. Memorable meetings The first days of the peace, despite the general rejoicing, for me were overshadowed by Baturin's confession of

Batov's deliberate decision to let my company into the minefield. Before, I had no doubts that this decision to force the penalty boxers to attack the enemy through an undefeated minefield was not made without the participation of our battalion commander. And so it was a pity for those guys who died there. And now they, as they went shoulder to shoulder to battle with the enemy, lie next to each other in a foreign land, under a gray alien sky, bequeathing only eternal memory and immeasurable sorrow to us, fighting friends, and their relatives and friends. Although we all understood that orders are given to be carried out unquestioningly, especially in wartime. But they also understood that this is why any order must be both logical and reasonable, and, despite the war, simply

humane.

... After that memorable evening on May 1, when I fainted at Baturin's, I developed a high fever that lasted for three days. By the day of our trip to the Reichstag, it dropped to normal, but on May 9 it again went off scale for 39 degrees, and I was delirious for almost a day. After 2-3 days everything went back to normal. However, with a frequency of 7-9 days, such attacks began to recur regularly, and even Stepan Petrovich himself, our generally recognized medical authority, was at a loss: a severe febrile state and clouding of consciousness are similar to signs of sepsis, as a result of blood poisoning, but a decrease in fever after 2 -3 days and feeling normal after that, and even periodic bouts of such a fever are completely uncharacteristic for

sepsis.

I tried not to provoke these attacks, believing that their severity may depend on alcohol. And when we, the "Oderites", received orders for crossing the Oder, I participated in a gala dinner on this occasion, but I did not even touch a glass.

And then all my platoons received some "Nevsky", some "Khmelnitsky", and I and Nikolai Slautin, who replaced me after being wounded, received the Order of the Red Banner of War. The guys, in order for their orders to shine well, rubbed their oxidized, blackened surface with mercury (from an ordinary thermometer broken on this occasion). But on the Order of the Red Banner of such blackened details there are only two small images of a plow and a hammer on a white enamel background, the rest are all gilded. And the well-wishers from the holders of other orders decided to "renew" our orders as well. And it so happened that mercury, hitting the gilded surfaces, instantly turned a thin layer of gilding into a silver amalgam. And the order became not gold, but silver. For many years, in order to make the order look like itself, I covered these whitened parts with bronze paint. And only seven years later, when I was already studying at the Leningrad Military Academy, someone advised me to write a letter to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR with a request to replace the order that had fallen into disrepair. To be honest, I had no hope of a replacement, but literally a week later I received a government letter signed by the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Nikolai Mikhailovich Shvernik, where I was recommended to hand over the order for repair to the Leningrad Mint, and its director was instructed to repair the order

"with the consumption of precious metals at the expense of the funds of the Supreme Council." I handed over the order, and literally five days later they returned it to me with restored gilding and a black plow and hammer. I even doubted whether the order was awarded to me or a completely new one. But when I looked at the number stamped on the reverse side, I saw a familiar, barely noticeable scratch. So this is mine, native, blood, "Oder". So since then it has been shining on my uniform with unfading gilding.

And then, near Berlin, our battalion doctor Buzun reported to the battalion commander that I needed to be urgently hospitalized with an unknown disease. And they took me to the city of Neu-Ruppin, to some kind of hospital. A few days later, after the second attack, when my temperature returned to normal, I was discharged with a diagnosis of post-concussion cephalgia, which, as they explained to me, meant inflammation of the meninges due to a contusion received during

head wounds. But, as life later showed, the main cause of these strange attacks of mine was never established there. June has

come. Debilitating bouts of an unknown disease were increasingly exhausting my already noticeably weakened body. And in the battalion, work began on the release of penalists amnestied on the occasion of the Great Victory, who did not have time to take part in the battles. I reported to the

battalion commander that I wanted to take my wife either to Leningrad, at her place of residence before the war, or near Warsaw, to Rembertow, where her former hospital was located and where my mother-in-law, a senior lieutenant of the medical service, was

serving. By that time, passenger traffic had already been established and the express train "Moscow-Berlin-Moscow" was running on schedule. The necessary documents were processed quickly, and the next day the battalion commander gave his "jeep" to Chief of Staff Philip Kiselev so that I would be taken to the Silesian railway station in Berlin. Together with Kiselyov, Semykin and Tsigichko volunteered to see us off.

And again we drove through Berlin. Little has changed in this first month of peace, but the streets were mostly cleared, the white flags were no longer hung, and there were more people on the streets. Quite often came across our army camp kitchens, distributing food to the elderly and children. Soon we arrived at the

station and went to the commandant. Tickets, it turns out, have already been sold, only the "booking" remains, which will be sold no earlier than an hour before the train departs. Several junior officers were already standing by the cash desk. My heart ached: what if we don't get tickets ... But everything worked out. We rejoiced! And the train was already waiting on the platform, and the boarding was actually ending. The guys quickly took us to the car. Goodbye. Maybe forever?

The train quickly picked up speed, and we stood at the open window in the common corridor opposite our compartment and could not get enough of the air, as if smelling of a quick meeting with the Motherland.

The mass dispatch of troops in trains has already begun: both to the Far East to end the war with Japan, and to Moscow and other cities for demobilization. We all remember these events both from documentaries and feature films, and we, contemporaries of this, also remember that even on the roofs of train cars

Berlin-Moscow turned out to be quite a few "hares" who did not want to wait for the formation of echelons and rushed home after so many years of war. It must be said that in Germany the railway network was quite developed and railway crossings in most cases were replaced by viaducts for crossing tracks at different levels, and these relatively common bridge structures were unsafe for those who were on the roofs. Such a tragic incident happened on our train. Some soldier, who decided to speed up his return to his homeland, rode on the roof of our car, but, apparently, did not pay attention to the approaching viaduct in time and walked or stood on the roof to his full height. From hitting his head on the iron trusses of this bridge structure, he crushed his skull and threw him off the roof on the move. Apparently, the driver noticed this, and the train stopped. It was a heavy impression - from the death of a warrior who reached Berlin, but failed to return alive from it to his homeland. And this heavy feeling did not leave us for a long time ...

Soon the Oder was moved, and then the border of what was then Germany. What a contrast between the population of defeated Germany and liberated Poland! Here, at every station where the train stopped for at least a few minutes, our wagons were literally covered with merchants of all kinds of food and goods, from watches, lighters and jewelry to boots and all kinds of German military uniforms. From the many-voiced inviting din, one could still hear "milk winter, kava goronets" (cold milk, hot coffee), "igniters, bibulki" (matches, pieces of paper cut for cigarette rolls). Less often sounded "bimber", "monopolka" (these are strong drinks already known to the reader). And in general, what they just didn't offer both for sale and in exchange. It seemed that the entire population of these station towns and villages turned into traders or money changers. And it was hard to say who was more among them - children, teenagers, women or men. And the currency in use was very different: both Polish zlotys, and German marks - the so-called occupation, or Reichsmarks, and Soviet rubles. In general, "international fair". And so all the way, until Warsaw itself.

There we learned that in Rembertów the train would stop for 1-2 minutes. And we didn't need more, so we got ready to leave,

fortunately, we were not burdened with things, only Rita had several dresses in a size that took into account her increasingly fat figure. We drove along the already restored bridge over the Vistula, which we now saw calm, majestic. We drove into Prague (the left-bank suburb of Warsaw). A few more minutes - and we are at the final point of our journey, in Rembertow.

It was a beautiful day in mid-June. Where the hospital is located, we learned from the commandant of the station, who ordered the patrol stationed here to escort us.

Before we had time to approach the large building where the hospital was located, they noticed us, and a crowd of girls, Rita's girlfriends, poured out to meet us. I immediately recognized Lyusya Pegova and Zoya Farvazova, the witnesses of our front-line wedding, the pretty Mira Yakovlevna Gurevich, the surgeon, and someone else, but Ekaterina Nikolaevna was not there. Immediately, a cheerful gang volunteered to escort us to her "meshkannya", as it was already customary in Polish to call housing here, or rather, housing. Well, there is no need to talk about this meeting, it was so warm, with tears in her eyes. Apparently, from Rita's letters, her mother knew about our possible arrival in the near future,

and in the house she occupied, we were allotted a well-furnished room. Rita's brother Stasik was no longer here. In May, he turned 18, and a few months before that date, he was drafted into the army by the field military registration and enlistment office. Already somewhere in Germany, in a military unit, he was retrained from a rider to a driver, taking into account the skills he had received in the hospital, when in his free time from driving a horse he learned to drive a car.

At the family council, they decided that Rita would remain in the hospital while her mother served here, and if the time came, she would give birth here, under the supervision of her doctors and the future grandmother herself.

Literally on the third day, an attack of a feverish surge of temperature returned to me, almost up to 40 degrees, and I was placed in the same hospital, where there was also no doctor who would accurately determine the nature of this ailment. And in the same way, after two or three days of a delusional state, the temperature dropped sharply to normal, but only my body was less and less able to restore strength, and each subsequent attack was more and more difficult.

Not far from Rembertów, in a town, I think it was called Vesela Góra, there was another, not a surgical, but a therapeutic hospital, from where a consultant doctor was brought to me. He was an elderly lieutenant-colonel, white as a harrier, with the same luxuriant mustache that was white as white. He carefully examined and felt me, demanded that they take the necessary blood tests from me and took them with him. And a day or two later he came with the conclusion: "The patient suffers from frequent bouts of tropical malaria." This news was truly unexpected. Where? Yes, even tropical, if I have never been anywhere south of Ufa? And the version of sepsis immediately disappeared, as it was supposed earlier. After all, even then, after a head wound, when Rita could not find me among the wounded, the doctor told her: "He has a high temperature, most likely - sepsis and, apparently, he needs to be looked for already in the morgue." Well, thank God, now the cause

of my illness is clear, and the cure will be adequate.

I had to go to this therapeutic hospital, where they undertook to intensively treat me with some exotic injections both for this outlandish fever and for severe anemia. My attending physician was the mustachioed lieutenant colonel. I even remembered his last name - Pilipenko, but forgot his first and middle name, although I corresponded with him for a long time and even, when I was studying at the Leningrad Academy, met him, already retired and living in Leningrad. And then the military was brought to this hospital with whatever

diseases. I remember well that once they brought a group of officers and soldiers poisoned with methyl, or, as they said then, "wood" alcohol. And the consequences were tragic. Several people were completely blind, and some could not be saved at all. And this is already a month or two after the end of the war. How bitter it must have been for the survivors, but blinded, and how painful for the relatives of those who did not survive the temptation to "grab" something alcohol. It would have been better if they had had enough of the burning and fetid "bimber" infused with calcium carbide - they would have spoiled the stomachs, but they would not have left this world, which was so beautiful without a war ...

And between bouts of my disease, both exotic and intractable, when my condition allowed, I traveled, and

sometimes he went "home", visited Rita, who was preparing to become a mother. Yes, and he gradually prepared for fatherhood. My condition began to improve little by little, the attacks became easier and even less frequent. And he got closer and closer to the hospital staff, where Rita was again nominally assigned to the service, put on all types of allowances, which was important at that time.

All cultural and mass work in the hospital was led by a cheerful, energetic girl - the Komsomol organizer of the hospital Lida Bakosh. She also "pricked" me into amateur performances: at concerts, when I was able, I read with pleasure both Simonov's "Wait for me" and "An open letter to a woman from the city of Vichuga", which had special success with listeners, as well as "Poems about a Soviet passport" and excerpts from the poem "Good" by Mayakovsky.

My memory had somewhat weakened after the head wound, but I remembered Mayakovsky well from school. But my guitar and vocal exercises, which brightened up the time in the medical battalion after a mine explosion, for some reason stopped working out for me. And when I spoke about this with my doctor, Pilipenko, he suggested that this might be the result of a head wound and brain contusion. Well, and God bless them, these my musical data. The important thing is that I began to gradually get better.

Rita also took part in amateur performances, but she no longer danced "hopak" and "lady", but she was still begged for a slow "gypsy". Some kind of

Polish military school was located in the barracks next to the hospital. Our concerts were held there as well. Apparently, according to the national tradition of the Polish Army, the cadets were taught ballroom dancing and often had dance evenings. Rita begged me to go there with her at least sometimes. Of course, I protected her, resisted, but her mother, to my surprise, took Rita's side, and I gave up. And Ekaterina Nikolaevna also managed, by putting cotton wool in certain places of women's clothing, to make her daughter's pregnancy almost imperceptible. And then one day, at such

a dance evening, a rather elderly Polish officer invited Rita to some tricky mazurka, where he knelt in front of her, threw his sword forward, and the partner had to waltz around, jumping

through her. What pleasure was on Rita's face when she performed all these pirouettes with brilliance, and at the end of the dance the gentleman bowed gallantly, kissed her hand, and said that he had not danced with such a skillful partner for a long time. Rita was beside herself with joy and pride, blushed, but, returning home, she realized that childbirth was coming, although, according to our calculations, it was not yet time for them.

At night, we took her to the hospital almost through the whole of Rembertow, often, during contractions, we stopped and Rita sat down on a chair that I took on the advice of her mother. They brought her to the hospital, and Rita and her mother left, and they left me all night waiting for the result. I smoked mercilessly, striding tens of kilometers along the corridor, worrying about her. And in the morning she gave birth. Her mother took the birth, and Mira Gurevich assisted her.

I knew that newborns are, of course, very small, but ours turned out to be so small! As I was later told, he only had a little more than a kilogram, and his height was non-standard, small. Such a skinny body. Of course, premature birth is not so much the result of a mazurka, but a consequence of what Rita, and the little man who was then maturing in her, had to endure in the war, especially on the battlefield. Inna Pavlovna Rudenko wrote correctly: "war is not the best of midwives." At dawn, when I was admitted to Rita, I

photographed the happy mother with her newly born son. Long before the birth, we came up with a name for the unborn child. I offered to name, if there is a son, Arkady. Let, I said, be Arkady Alexandrovich, in honor of my first and favorite front-line battalion commander Osipov. And even one day he lived with us under this name. But then Rita's eyes filled with tears, and the next day she said that she dreamed at night of her father, who died in besieged Leningrad, and she would like to name our first-born Sergei in honor of his father. I didn't have any reason to object.

For the first week, our Serezhenka was kept in an urgently built "incubator", heated with electric lamps and heating pads. And then he grew up, caught up. Coeval of Victory! Now, when I write these lines, he is already 57. And he "reached" height, almost 180, and "gained" weight - about a centner! And for six years, his parent, caring mother and kind grandmother are gone.

And then, shortly after the birth of my son, I underwent an operation to extract a German bullet that had been sitting in me for more than a year after a memorable wound near Brest. The operation was forced, since this bullet, migrating in the body, went under the skin in the most uncomfortable place and did not allow me to sit or lie still. They took it out relatively easily, under local anesthesia, but my body, probably weakened by severe malaria, reacted inadequately. When I went out into the yard after the operation, I felt sick, and I could barely stand on my feet ... But in

general, my malaria began to recede a little, its attacks became more rare and less debilitating, the temperature no longer brought me to delusional state, and I could (and should already) return to the battalion. But then the task arose: both the child must be registered and the marriage legalized. I went to Warsaw, went to the commandant's office of the city, hoping to arrange everything quickly. There they explained to me that the Consular Section of the Soviet Embassy was now functioning in Warsaw, where all acts of civil status were registered. I found this institution and learned that to register a marriage, the presence of both "marriages" is necessary, and to register a child, a document confirming the fact of his birth is enough.

A few days later, in the car of the head of the hospital, we, festively dressed, with polished orders and medals, ended up in the right place. The registration procedure was simple: we made marks in our official documents and issued marriage and birth certificates for our son. And in this certificate they wrote down in the column "place of birth": "the city of Warsaw, Poland." And what a coincidence: Rita's father, Sergei Mikhailovich Makarievsky, is Russian, his ancestors had Polish roots, and now his grandson Sergei was born on the land of his grandfather's ancestors. The boy

grew up well. A kind of strong man began to take shape from a thin, small body. Rita had so much breast milk that Seryozha was more than enough, and she also had to express excess at night. This circumstance quickly became known to the Polish cobetans, who had a shortage of this valuable product. And then they took these surpluses, and in return they brought Rita fruits and vegetables. Such is the "barter"! So Serezha had "milk brothers or sisters" growing up in Rembertów.

So, I had no worries about the health of Rita and my son, especially since they were under the vigilant and careful supervision of an experienced doctor of my own mother and grandmother.

... It was already the middle of September. Realizing that our penal battalion should cease to exist due to the end of the war, I was in a hurry to leave for Berlin. I did not manage to find the battalion in its original place, it had already been disbanded. I went to Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin, to the headquarters of the GSOVG (Group of Soviet Occupation Forces of Germany), where I found the personnel department, where Colonel Kirov outlined the essence of the matter to me and read out the very certification in which my former battalion commander wrote: "Major Pyltsyn is a promising officer. It is advisable to leave in the cadres of the Armed Forces." And this major was just over 21 years old.

Kirov rummaged through some more papers, shrugged his shoulders and said that for some reason I had not been presented for an award on the occasion of the end of the war. In response to my remark that I had recently received an order for crossing the Oder and participating in the Berlin operation, he said that there was an order in honor of the Victory and, in connection with the disbandment of the penal battalion, to present officers who had been in the battalion for more than a year for

awarding orders of the Patriotic War. I already had four orders and a medal "For Courage", and somehow I did not really regret what had happened. I just thought that the proverb "out of sight - out of mind" is very true, and that even so, but Baturin took revenge on me for my obstinacy.

Here, at the headquarters, I met Vasily Nazykov, who was a foreman at the headquarters of the penal battalion - the head of record keeping, and now he has been promoted to lieutenant and serves at the headquarters of the Group. He confirmed my assumptions: when Major Matvienko, my former company commander, and for the last six months - deputy battalion commander, offered Baturin an award sheet for me, he put it aside, saying that I had recently received a very high

award. Meanwhile, there, in Potsdam, Colonel Kirov told me: "It makes no sense to appoint you commander of a rifle battalion in accordance with the conclusion of the certification, since it is possible that this battalion will be determined tomorrow to be disbanded, and to the Far East, so that to make war with the Japanese, you're already too late. Yes, it seems to you that this was enough." And he offered me a position

deputy battalion commander in the Separate Security Battalion of the military commandant's office of Leipzig, one of the largest cities that were part of the Soviet zone of

occupation of Germany. As I later found out, before the formation of the government of Germany, its entire life, both political and economic, was in charge of the Soviet Military Administration (SVAG) at the headquarters of the GSOVG, and Leipzig was under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Military

Administration of the Federal Land of Saxony. As I learned later, many of my fighting friends were appointed precisely as military commandants of cities, towns and station settlements, and it was they who were entrusted with the tasks of leading the political, administrative and economic management of the life of the civilian population, that is, to perform the functions of local authorities.

I had no objections to being appointed to this battalion, especially since it was also, like the penal battalion, separate, which means in the position of a regiment, and I, as a deputy battalion commander, received the rights of a line battalion commander, which corresponded to the conclusion on certification. On the second day I went to Leipzig. The trains were running on a fixed schedule. The carriages seemed strange to me: each compartment had an independent exit from the carriage to the footboard, which stretched along the entire carriage, and in the compartment there were only seats. Of course, in comparison with our Motherland, which can be overcome from end to end in only 8-10 days of travel, Germany seemed small and it was only four hours to Leipzig.

I arrived at the commandant's office of the city, and I was taken to the location of the battalion in a duty car. I still remember that he was in a large barracks at Lessingstrasse 20, and nearby in house No. 18 there were officers' apartments, where I was given a well-furnished 5-room apartment on the second floor with two bathrooms and toilets. What a luxury! And what are the three of us going to do in these apartments? The battalion

commander, also a major, Leonid Ilyich Milstein was five years older than me. Tall, slender, with a pleasant, if not handsome, face. One of his attractions was an elegant, dapper, wheat-red mustache.

One of the deputies of the battalion commander and at the same time the chief of staff was Major Mavlyutov, a Tatar, a very mobile, humorous person who communicated with the Germans in some incredible mixture of Tatar and German, diluted with individual Russian words.

First of all, I was interested in how relations develop after the war, and even in a team that is different from the penal battalion. In general, I was pleased with the officer environment in which I found myself (including the head of supply, Captain Gutkin, a balanced person who, perhaps, has only one oddity - it is imperative to "take a sample" in two kitchens at once - a soldier's and an officer's, and in both cases he does not only taste the quality of the food being prepared, but also ate full portions, and, having had enough of both, said: "I must know if these portions are enough so that both the soldier and the officer do not remain hungry").

The battalion, in addition to protecting former military facilities, industrial and energy production, served to protect the commandant's office of the city, patrolled the streets and the station, and, together with military units, was involved in catching separate groups and individuals wandering somewhere in the forests from the ranks of the Wehrmacht, SD and SS. I will not dwell on the details of this service. I will give just one example. According to the testimonies of one such caught group of fascists, a rather large secret warehouse of weapons and ammunition was discovered, for the export of which a column of twenty Studebakers was needed. I soon got used to my

official duties, which included, first of all, the organization of guard duty at military factories and other important facilities (in total there were more than a dozen guards out of at least three or four posts in each). I had to study the location of these protected objects, determine ways to change and check them. This allowed me to quickly familiarize myself with the layout of the city. Compared with Berlin in May 1945, Leipzig at the end of that year

was a stark contrast. Firstly, it was less destroyed, and the streets and entire neighborhoods were carefully cleared, even washed, the ruins of buildings were fenced in German neat fences. The diverse architecture of the preserved buildings and the layout of the streets and squares created the impression

well-maintained European city. I remember that our Lessingstrasse took its origin from the Arollo cinema, which became our garrison officers' club and soldiers' cinema.

It constantly showed Soviet films, as well as German trophy ones, including "The Girl of My Dreams" with the famous actress Marika Rokk. Famous Soviet actors often performed in the same cinema, among which Sergey Lemeshev, beloved by everyone from the film "Musical History", the famous pianist Lev Oborin, singer Irina Maslennikova and many other celebrities, were especially remembered. I had the pleasure of talking to some of them. Once, two weeks before the New Year, battalion

commander Milstein asked me that I was delaying the move of my family to me. He seemed to guess my thoughts, spinning in my head lately. Two days later I was already driving for Rita and Serezhenka, and a few more days later we were in Leipzig. The hospital in which Rita's mother

remained was to be disbanded, and all the doctors were to be demobilized. Ekaterina Nikolaevna and I had an agreement that after her dismissal she would come to us in Leipzig. And already in March 1946, having retired to the reserve, she arrived.

The first impressions of them, native Leningraders, about Leipzig were enthusiastic: it reminded them of their native Leningrad and the variety of architecture of the old, XVI-XVIII centuries, buildings and the abundance of churches built in the Middle Ages, as well as many sculptural compositions by the fountains, openwork gratings of bridges and bridges across canals and streams, although not as many and not as numerous as in the city on the Neva, in which, as you know, there are 333 bridges across the Neva, Nevka, Moika, Fontanka and numerous canals that are not similar to each other. And even the absence of such a large river as the Neva did not diminish the similarity.

And there were a lot of museums in the city. Of particular interest were the Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Books and Writing, which housed an exemplary printing house, where everything needed was now printed in Russian. Of particular interest to the Russian contingent of the entire group of troops and numerous sightseers was the room in which the historical trial took place in 1933 - the fascist trial of the famous Bulgarian

a communist falsely accused of setting fire to the Reichstag - Georgy Dimitrov, who, with his fiery speech at the trial, exposed fascism.

Another attraction

of Leipzig was no less popular - the Battle of the Nations museum-monument, built in honor of the victory of Russian troops in 1813 over Napoleon and an Orthodox church erected next to it, in which Russian clergy conducted church services and rituals in our time. . In general, we gradually got used to the interesting city of Leipzig (which so reminded my Leningraders

of their hometown), and with its environs. Somehow, my fighting friends, who were seeing us off at the Silesian railway station in Berlin, found me. At first,

Vasya Tsigichko, who worked as a military commandant of a small town near Dresden and soon left for the Union to replace us, came to visit us, and then Valera Semykin, who worked in the city of Halle, not far from Leipzig, as a military representative at one of the military factories, which was under reparations was to be exported to the USSR. Rita and I also visited Valery, until this plant was completely taken out.

Oh, what cordial meetings they were, how much sincerity and fraternal feelings were in them! After all, the front brought us all together. Quite recently I received a letter from Valery, in which he wrote about our war years: "One 8th is worth something!" After

about a year of my work in the security battalion, I was transferred with a promotion to the position of senior officer for operational issues of the city commandant's office, directly subordinate to the military commandant of the city, Colonel Borisov Vladimir Alekseevich (if I remembered his name and patronymic correctly). I was also offered new housing, closer to the

commandant's office - a rich mansion at 24 Montbestrasse Street (I remember it!), Previously owned by some large Nazi industrialist who had fled to the West. A company car "Opel-super-6" with a driver was also assigned to me. One of my new responsibilities was to meet and escort the famous guests of Leipzig around the city. I will talk about some of these guests a little later.

Since the commandant of the city himself was now my boss, I would like to elaborate on my impressions of this very extraordinary person - Colonel Borisov Vladimir Alekseevich (?). I don't know if the rumors were true that he was a former army commissar of the 1st rank, who, for the failure of the troops in the battles near Kerch, was allegedly demoted to a junior officer and during the war again rose to a colonel. But he was a very attentive, fair and benevolent commander, who enjoyed great respect from all who happened to serve here under his command. Either he was generally gentle in character, including with his subordinates, or this black streak in his biography formed such qualities in him, but he favorably differed from many bosses with whom I had to deal with for many years of army life have a working relationship. He knew by name almost all the officers of the commandant's office of the city and districts (and there were six of them in the city), paid a lot of attention to the activities of the command staff of the security battalion (maybe that's why he transferred me, a twenty-three-year-old major, to his direct

subordination). In the summer of 1947 he was urgently recalled to Moscow. And, as it turned out, he was again convicted for some deeds or words (or maybe it was a continuation of the Kerch case) and exiled to camps

for some long time. The machine of repression continued to work...

Less than a month later, for some reason, by order of the Leipzig district, I was suddenly transferred to the second-class commandant's office of the small town of Debeln (I will state the alleged reason for this event in the part where we will talk about the military commander of the Leipzig district).

At the beginning of 1948, when I was replaced in the Moscow Military District, I found the family of Vladimir Alekseevich Borisov, and his wife, who remembered me from Leipzig, said that he was again deprived of his rank and somewhere in exile he was given a job as a clerk at the camp authorities. She visits him every six months and will soon go again. And since he asked to bring him at least some number of pencils, pens with nibs and ink, washing rubber and school rulers, I wandered around Moscow to get it all, adding what I could from my German "trophies" taken out for my

already a two-year-old son, and handed it to her. After another trip to her husband, she told me how happy the twice demoted officer was with these stationery. How the fate of the former army commissar, former colonel, military commandant of one of the largest cities in defeated Germany turned out, I, unfortunately, do not know.

And in the commandant's office of Leipzig, after the recall of Colonel Borisov, noticeable changes took place. Colonel Pinchuk became the commandant, Major Goldin (a friend of the battalion commander Milshtein) was appointed in my place, most of the military commandants of the city districts changed. What this had to do with the fate of Borisov, I don't know, but it seemed to me that the root cause of these changes was the Military Commandant of the Leipzig district, Colonel Ivan Litvin (I don't remember his patronymic).

Colonel Litvin was somehow strange. Just two examples. Once he called for a meeting of the commandants of the districts of the city and the battalion commander, whom I replaced during the holidays. And I don't remember why I didn't have time to change into my uniform for the formation (trousers into boots) and I arrived in loose trousers. Moreover, I managed to sit in the front row. Litvin held the meeting in a club room, on the stage of which there was a large table covered with red cloth, and in the background there was a full-length portrait of Stalin.

Noticing that I arrived "out of shape", Litvin began to scold me without hesitation in expressions. That I'm not a military man at all, since I don't wear boots, and that in general only fools wear such trousers, and so on. It became interesting to me how he would finish these outpourings if he paid attention to the portrait of Stalin standing behind him, where he is depicted in a tunic and ... loose trousers, although earlier we most often saw images of Stalin in boots. And then I began to stubbornly look not "in the eyes of the authorities", but past, at the portrait of the Generalissimo. In the end, the colonel followed my gaze, abruptly broke off his protracted moralization and angrily commanded me "Sit down!". He hated me fiercely. And even when an order was received to transfer to the Polish

government the lists of officers who participated in the liberation of Warsaw and other Polish cities, for awarding Polish orders, my surname

was crossed out personally by Litvinov. So he took revenge on me, thus depriving me of the Polish order "Virtuti Militari", with which many were awarded.

Apparently, he had a difficult relationship with the commandant of the city Borisov, and as if not at his suggestion, Vladimir Alekseevich was recalled and put into exile, since Litvin immediately began to clear the "nest of the enemy of the people." Here I also fell under his hot hand, who was also appointed "in exile" with an actual demotion. But this all happened already in the middle of 1947. And before that, I continued to work for Colonel Borisov. And among other things, he carried out instructions for organizing meetings of eminent guests of the city. The first person I met was the marshal of the armored forces

Rotmistrov Pavel Alekseevich. And immediately there was an incident.

I went to the place indicated to me on the Berlin motorway ("autobahn", in local terminology), where the meeting was to take place at the agreed time. After waiting half an hour after the set time, I decided to drive on to find out if something had happened to the marshal's car, or maybe I had misidentified the meeting point. After driving five or six kilometers, the marshal's car was nowhere to be found. I only noticed that cars were parked in several places away from the highway and either the drivers were repairing them, or the owners of these cars had settled down for a picnic.

More than an hour had passed, and I decided to return to the commandant's office. At the entrance to the city, from the officer on duty at one of the district commandant's offices, he reported to Colonel Borisov about the failure by telephone. He, despite his restraint, cursed me with a mouthpiece and ordered me to urgently arrive for an explanation, since the marshal had already reached himself.

You have to guess with what feelings I rushed there. When I went into the commandant's office, I saw Rotmistrov there with a characteristic, almost Budyonnovsky mustache and round glasses, which were not at all fashionable at that time. Before I had time to turn to the marshal so that he would allow me to report to the colonel on my arrival, the commandant immediately fell upon me with polite, but unusually caustic words of reproach. Then Marshal Rotmistrov stopped him, saying: "Do not scold this handsome major. He honestly tried to find me, but something happened to my car and I ordered the driver to get off the road to fix the problem."

his tunic and rested next to the car. I saw this major passing by, but I did not think that this was my escort. That's how we missed each other and please don't punish him."

So unfortunate, but without consequences, a misunderstanding ended with my first meeting of an

eminent guest. The second, already more successful meeting on the same road was with Marshal of the Soviet Union Budyonny Semyon Mikhailovich. He came to the opening of the first post-war international Leipzig fair. The meeting took place at the exactly appointed place and close to the agreed time, so I had to wait for the marshal at this place no more than 10-15 minutes. The marshal's car was followed by four or five more cars. Semyon Mikhailovich called me to his car, pointed me to a free seat next to the driver, also a major, like me, and ordered him to follow where I would point. I already knew the city quite well, so I navigated it freely.

On the way, the marshal asked about my family and about my war. I did not hide from him the service in the SB, which was then somehow not customary to advertise, to which he did not seem to pay attention, in any case, he did not ask a single clarifying question about this.

I had to deliver this whole cavalcade of cars straight to the fair. Everything was successful, even at the exhibition, by the time the marshal arrived, an honor guard was put up from the guard battalion, which was headed by a company commander well known to me, a handsome man of gypsy blood, senior lieutenant Bader, a dapper officer who masterfully mastered combat techniques. Semyon Mikhailovich accepted his report, then greeted commandant Borisov and his entourage, and then turned around. Seeing me, he beckoned me with his finger and thanked me in a fatherly way, shook my hand and wished me success in my future service for many years to

come. I had many such memorable meetings in Germany, but I will tell you about a few of them concerning very famous people. And one of them is a meeting with Marshal of Victory Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov. For the first time I

saw the famous marshal with my own eyes when he came to Leipzig to hunt deer. I was then a deputy battalion commander in the security battalion, and I was instructed to organize the protection of the hunting area, where there was a parking lot for Zhukov and

persons accompanying him. I saw the marshal close, from 10-15 meters. He turned out to be not at all a giant, as I imagined him, but of medium height, strong, thick-set, dense and, at the same time, quite mobile. He was dressed not in a marshal's uniform, but in a leather jacket, trousers, and, it seems, army boots. On the head - an unusual shape, also a leather cap, or some kind of unshaped cap with a visor, similar to a cap. The very process of hunting, driving and shooting the beast took

place not before our eyes, but somewhere not far away. We only heard a few shots. Then everyone gathered on the same platform where the cars stood, dragged two dead deer. One of the avid hunters, my battalion commander, Major Leonid Milshtein, approached the frustrated marshal and said something to him. He, somehow puffed up, looked at him and loudly, clearly (so that we all heard), strongly, swore in Russian and said a phrase that I remembered:

"I didn't come for meat harvesting, but for hunting!" Then the battalion commander told me that Zhukov's shot was unsuccessful, he shot at a running deer and drove the charge into a tree, behind which a deer ran at the moment of the shot. And they, who helped organize the hunt, laid down two. And then he, Milstein, was instructed to offer the marshal one of the hunting trophies as a gift. What came of it is clear. They were afraid that one of the organizers of this hunt, which had turned out unsuccessfully for the Commander-in-Chief of the Group of Forces, would "go nuts" from an angry commander. But, as they say, the event had no consequences.

And soon, as Commander-in-Chief of the GSOVG, Marshal Zhukov was replaced by Vasily Danilovich Sokolovsky, who had recently received the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union, who had previously been Zhukov's chief of staff.

The sudden removal of Marshal Zhukov from the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Group of Forces and the appointment of V. D. Sokolovsky in his place then gave rise to many rumors and speculations. It was like thunder from a clear sky. Portraits of three times Hero of the Soviet Union Marshal of the Soviet Union G.K. Zhukov were urgently shot in the soldiers' barracks and commandant's offices. Something vague and indistinct was said about his wrong policy towards the allies. The new

Commander-in-Chief urgently needed to make various personalized folders with the titles of the new Commander-in-Chief imprinted on them in gold, notebooks, packs

high quality paper with new props. This order was urgently prepared, and I was instructed to take it to Berlin, or rather, to Potsdam, where the headquarters of the Group and the Soviet Military Administration were located.

We loaded all these voluminous bales and packages into a passenger car. They gave me two more armed soldiers. It was already about noon when we set off. We arrived at Berlin almost at sunset, then we passed several checkpoints, where our documents were carefully checked and the cargo was examined. As a result, when we got to the building where the Commander-in-Chief worked, it was already evening. The officer standing at the entrance to this building, having checked my documents, offered to wait a bit. Soon two well-dressed sergeants came out to him, who took all this cargo, and the officer led us along long corridors to the marshal's office, leaving the soldiers accompanying me in the car. Having detained me in the reception room of the Commander-in-Chief, the officer returned after a while and, with the permission of the major on duty at the reception, signaled for me to enter the office, and all this cargo was brought in after me. I entered, saw the marshal and, as clearly as I could, reported to him about the completion of his task. Surprisingly, during my report, the Commander-in-Chief stood up. He seemed to me very tall, with a stern face and at the same time friendly. After reviewing each item, even flipping through several notebooks, he thanked me for the delivery and asked me to convey his gratitude to the commandant of Leipzig and everyone who organized the execution of his order. At the end of the visit, he shook my hand. His handshake was firm, resolute, and I got the impression that his hand was much larger than mine and that it was either a carpenter's hand or a farmer's hand. Previously, I had heard almost nothing about this commander, but after the meeting I thought that this was probably a good replacement for the famous Marshal Zhukov.

One cool autumn day in 1946, we, about a dozen officers of the battalion, among whom, I remember, was the brilliant officer Bader already known to the reader, and some officers of the commandant's offices, were unexpectedly summoned to the Office of the city commandant's office in the uniform "under the belt" (for building) and from there, under the command of Deputy Commandant Colonel Trufanov, seated in several cars, they were taken to some military airfield, where

the plane landed soon after. We were lined up close to where the Douglas had stopped. A man in a dark overcoat (or in a uniform raincoat) with insignia incomprehensible to us came out of it. With some general who met him, he headed towards us. Even from a distance I recognized this man from portraits and newsreels, although I had never seen him personally. It was Andrei Yanuaryevich Vyshinsky, the former Prosecutor General of the USSR. As it turned out, he was in a hurry to the final of the Nuremberg Trials, where the trial of the main Nazi war criminals was underway. He had a kind of boring, penetrating look. Bypassing our brave system, he seemed to drill through everyone

with what I thought were steel-colored eyes.

Then I thought that under his gaze all the fascist leaders sitting on the dock of the International Tribunal at this Nuremberg trial would shrink. And for a long time we felt his gaze on us. And even now, remembering that meeting, it's as if I'm under the gun of his eyes again. But when I already served in the commandant's office, the most

memorable was the meeting with the son of the Generalissimo - General Vasily Iosifovich Stalin. I heard a lot about him back in the penal battalion from one penitentiary pilot who

served in the past in the air division commanded by Vasily Stalin, then still a colonel. When I drove onto the Berlin motorway to meet him, I already from a distance saw a densely marching column of cars,

in which, in addition to cars, there were two large van trucks. I got out of the car and stood on the side of the road. This whole column stopped, and a lieutenant colonel got out of the first car, who, almost without explaining himself, ordered me to get into his car and lead the entire column to the residence provided for the distinguished guest. And this residence we had a comfortable country villa "Limit". There, the officer on duty distributed trucks and part of the cars among the parking lots. General Stalin called me, and for the first time I saw him, paying attention to the fact that he, it seemed to me, was very similar to his father, Joseph Vissarionovich, in his youth. The general was small in stature, and his figure did not seem dense.

In some impolite tone, he asked where the commandant was, why he was not here at the villa. Realizing that I see in front of me not anyone, but the son of our Great Leader, I was somehow confused and said that the commandant was waiting for the general in the commandant's office. In response to this, Vasily Stalin said something like "I could meet here."

He said something to one of his officers, who apparently gave a previously agreed sign, and several passenger cars taxied in the direction of the exit from the villa. I was ordered to get into the lead car again (my "Opel", of course, again closed the column), and we drove off. The officers who were on duty at the villa informed the commandant's office about our departure by telephone. Soon we stopped in

front of the entrance to the courtyard of the commandant's office, where Colonel Borisov and his deputies were already waiting for the guest. The meeting from the outside seemed warm and cordial, or maybe it really was like that. Everyone went up to the second floor - Stalin and his wife (Marshal Timoshenko's daughter Ekaterina), followed by a rather overweight lieutenant colonel and their personal doctor in civilian clothes. The group was closed by a small senior lieutenant.

Together with them, his deputies, Colonels Pinchuk and Trufanov, and the head of the political department, Colonel Vinogradov, entered the commandant's office. I stayed at the door (you never know what command will follow). Literally a few minutes later, the same senior lieutenant came out of the office and asked to see the toilets, male and female. He examined them for a long time, apparently very carefully, then went back into the office and left a minute later.

I didn't know what the conversation was about in Borisov's office, but the head of the political department, Vinogradov (the namesake of our penal battalion agitator) came out and urgently sent his officers

(and officers of the security battalion, called to the commandant's office by that time) to the cultural and entertainment places of the city: in the variety show, the ballet theater and the circus, because they were offered to Vasily Stalin as objects of the cultural program. He chose the circus and went there with Colonel Pinchuk, his wife, his personal doctor, and that obese lieutenant colonel. I and another officer were ordered to accompany and protect them.

In the circus, as in other cultural and entertainment institutions in Leipzig, boxes were always booked for the needs of the commandant

cities. One of the boxes was occupied by guests of honor: General Vasily, his wife and Colonel Pinchuk were seated in the first row, and behind them was that same mysterious corpulent lieutenant colonel and doctor. We sat side by side, in the next box, and sat down in such a way that only a low barrier with an armrest separated me from the main guest.

The first part of the circus performance with gymnasts, wrestlers, acrobats, jugglers, security officers and clowns, who worked in an unusual manner for us of German flat, vulgar humor, the guests looked, it seemed to me, without much interest. When the first section ended and the attendants began to install equipment for attractions with predators in the arena, Vasily suddenly grabbed Pinchuk by the hand and said: "Take me to the animals, I want to look at them before entering the arena." Pinchuk seemed to be trying, albeit not very decisively, to stop the general, he was uncomfortable: after all, the population of the city knew both the commandant and his deputies and treated them with respect. But he failed to stop the guest, and like this, he trudged by the hand after the general through the not yet fenced off part of the arena. They were immediately followed by that obese lieutenant colonel.

When they returned, the fence had already been set up and they had to walk directly next to the German spectators, who took their places in the front rows. Their surprise at the shamelessness of the general and one of the deputy commandants was noticeable.

But then the second branch began with the participation of animals. It turns out that they did not take into account that eminent guests were sitting in the nearest box and behaved unrestrainedly, so the arena attendants needed to quickly cover with sawdust or sand what some of the animals inadvertently marked their stay here. Of course, neither sawdust nor sand could neutralize the "aroma" of these marks, and it reached the guests' sense of smell. The doctor gave Vasily's wife several tangerines, and she, peeling them in order to drown out unpleasant odors with fragrant slices, threw the crusts back over her shoulder, and there both the doctor and this respectable lieutenant colonel helpfully caught them. Naturally, some part of the audience was no longer looking at the arena, but at the guest box. We felt ashamed. The only consolation was the thought that the Germans did not know that this general was the son of the Great Stalin, who defeated Nazi Germany.

After the circus, Colonel Pinchuk left with his guests for a villa, where commandant Borisov was already waiting for them. I didn't need to go there and I didn't witness how General Vasily, seeing there a plentiful table set in his honor, said to Colonel Borisov: "Eat and drink this yourself. And show me a room where I can have dinner and rest". Turns out those big vans were his camp kitchen and refrigerator. He brought along cooks and waiters, as well as Moscow food and drinks.

I did not participate in the further provision of the program for General Stalin's stay in Leipzig, I only know that he spent two days in the city. Soon, as I said,

I was transferred to the commandant's office in the small town of Döbeln. I served in Döbeln for

a short time. It turned out that not far from him Rita's brother Stanislav was serving as a driver for the commander of the regiment of guards mortars ("Katyushas"), and we managed to meet quite often either at our place or at the apartment of the commander of the regiment, Major Gilenkov, with whom we developed good relations.

In December 1947, an order came from the commandant of the district, Colonel Litvin, to transfer me to the Union "for a planned replacement." And soon the already familiar train "Berlin-Moscow" took us to the east, to the native land of the Soviet Union.

In Moscow, our paths with Rita's mother, Ekaterina Nikolaevna, diverged: we remained in Moscow to wait for a new appointment, and she went to Leningrad, her hometown. Our

new life began and my military service continued on Soviet soil, which had not yet healed the wounds of the war and had not patched up all the holes in the economy. In this life there were many interesting and unexpected things. For me, too, fate has prepared many meetings with different people, which I will try to briefly describe in the next chapter.

Chapter 12 Hello

Motherland! The costs of monetary reform. In the district reserve in Moscow. Demotion assignment. Slanting Mountain near Tula. Birth of Alexander II. The winding path to the military academy. Diploma with honors. Troops "Uncle Vasya". Prykarpattya, 38th Army and its

generals. Far East again, Ussuriysk. Unforgettable meetings. Kharkov, Vietnam. Service final. The collapse of

the USSR Our move to the Soviet

Union was such a joyful event that we didn't even care that we crossed the border of the USSR on schedule in the evening, on the eve of the New Year, 1948. We all considered this coincidence to be a good sign, without even imagining the difficulties that we might have in connection with the completion of the first post-war monetary reform being carried out in the Soviet Union. We arrived at the border Brest, the same Brest, during the liberation of which three years ago our penal battalion suffered heavy losses, when, before the completion of the exchange of money issued to us at the place of service, for new ones (at the rate of ten old rubles for one new) was only two hours away. During this time, before the New Year, we had to have time to exchange

money.

We were shown the location of the exchange office at the station, and there was such a queue at the ticket office that they immediately explained to us that the amount that we could exchange would be noticeably limited.

In general, our not-so-tight wallets have become quite skinny. However, despite this trouble, having returned to our cars, we nevertheless celebrated the return to our homeland and the New Year, which so successfully coincided with this important event for us!

And the train left exactly on schedule, exactly at midnight, from Brest station, and our glasses of wine in honor of the New Year rang under the clang of buffers of the moving train. Almost without breaking away from the window, we looked and looked that first night at our native sky with, it seemed, incomparably larger and much brighter stars than there, in the strange and ever moving away from us West. During the day we could not be torn away from the contemplation of our native landscapes, meeting and seeing off our train of station workers flushed with frost, who replaced their husbands, brothers, most of whom did not return from the war. And how charming were the young girls in railway uniforms, albeit poorly dressed. Where are the vaunted Poles before them, and even more so the Germans. A mixed feeling of joy from returning to the Motherland and sadness from parting with friends dominated us.

Finally, Moscow. It's good that Rita had good distant relatives here, and we dropped by to see them for a week, as we expected, before receiving a new appointment. And we lived there for about three months, since the Personnel Department of the Moscow Military District seemed to be deliberately looking for a position for a long time. According to the then rules, more than two months of being in the reserve without a position entailed the termination of the payment of salaries, and we were forced, in order to live with our family in post-reform Moscow, to hand over almost all the little that we brought to buying shops for virtually nothing. I gradually became less and less selective in the positions offered to me and already agreed to any. That's when I "matured": being a major, I agreed to the post of senior lieutenant in the Kosogorsky district military registration and enlistment office of the Tula region, subordinate, as it turned out, to the captain, who had spent the entire war in

the rear. ...We got to Kosaya Gora. There is no housing. We settled in an apartment at the military enlistment office groom, until we were allocated a room for three of us eight meters in a common apartment with a stove, heated by low-calorie, but high-ash coal from the Tula mines. This "apartment" was located next to the Kosogorsky metallurgical plant, which constantly spewed out an incredible amount of smoke and soot from its pipes and blast furnace, because of which we, and especially little Serezhenka, sometimes had nothing to breathe. Yes, and Rita's second pregnancy became more difficult as a result of this. And I decided to send them to Leningrad, to my mother and grandmother, who had already settled there in their old small

apartment. Soon, closer to summer, I begged for a vacation and for the first time came to Leningrad, the city of Peter, the city of Lenin, the October Revolution, the city-hero. He shocked me with his beauty and, just as my women used to compare Leipzig with the city on the Neva, so now I compared it with the already distant Leipzig, and at every step I was convinced that Leipzig

was far from Leningrad. It was in this beautiful city that our second son was born. Rita wanted to call him Alexander. I did not mind, let Alexander I and Alexander II be in our family! (By the way, when Sasha grew up and got married, they also named their first child Alexander. It was already Alexander III!)

Unlike Serezha, Sasha was born full-weight and "full-length". He grew up quickly and, looking ahead, I will say that over time his height surpassed both Serezhin and mine - he grew to 184 cm. He was physically strong and with age showed more and more versatile abilities. And it turned out, as it was then fashionable to divide everyone into "physicists" and "lyricists", unlike Sergei, he grew up as a "lyricist". Not knowing musical notation, he mastered playing many musical instruments, including the piano, clarinet, saxophone, and guitar. He managed to create a vocal and instrumental ensemble (and then they were in vogue), toured the North with tours. He is also a poet and bard. He successfully graduated from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Kharkov University, majoring in English, mastered this language to perfection, developed his own methodology for studying it, defended his dissertation, became an assistant professor, headed the department of foreign languages in one of the technical universities, published and was the editor-in-chief of an all-Ukrainian journal on English language. True, in comparison with his older brother Sergei, who was distinguished by special accuracy and strict commitment, Sasha did not possess these qualities to a sufficient extent. Sergey also grew

up physically strong, strong, and a lover of hiking (he started from the Ussuri taiga and the Pacific coast of the Far Eastern Primorye, and then went all over the Black Sea coast of the Crimea and the Caucasus with a tent and stove stove). He started working as a hammerer at the age of 15. After graduating from physics and mathematics and serving in the army, he has been working as a physics teacher for more than 30 years. He is fond of traditional medicine and non-traditional methods of treatment. He mastered photography and video filming at a professional level. In general, "physicist".

But all this later, over the years. And then, after the end of my vacation, I took them all to my place on Kosaya Gora, in that very closet. And in this little room, where there was nowhere even to put a crib for a baby, our Sashenka slept ... in a suitcase. And one night the lid slammed shut and he almost suffocated in it. It's good that Rita woke up on time! Here we lived until 1950, when I entered the military academy.

And on Kosaya Gora we were lucky that Rita, periodically visiting Tula "on the food issue", accidentally met on the street

our front-line friend Zhora Sergeev, who was repeatedly my deputy in battles. So our connection was restored and was not interrupted until the very death of Zhora in 1974. I entered the Leningrad Military

Transport Academy in an unusual way. But a little background. In the Kosogorsk military registration and enlistment

office, I was in charge of accounting for reserve officers. There was a lot of work, there was a gradual reduction in the army - we, the military registration and enlistment office workers, felt this from the increasing influx of officers transferred to the reserve. And what worried me most of all was that military officers who did not have a civilian specialty went to the most unprestigious positions - watchmen, janitors, and even, despite severe injuries, to the most difficult work as bulk breakers in coal mines near Tula. I even remember a case when a lieutenant colonel, a former communications chief of the corps, a great practitioner, but who did not have a special education in this industry, could hardly get a job as a telephone operator on duty in some office.

I worked in the military registration and enlistment office for almost two years, and a decision ripened in me to enter at any cost to study at a military academy that would give the specialty needed "in civilian life." And then after all, the hour is uneven, they will be fired from the army, and who am I? Commander of the penal company? And who will need me? And I submitted a report to the Military

Law Academy (Moscow). Then the preliminary entrance examinations to all military academies were held at the headquarters of the districts, and their results were considered by the general mandate commissions. And the Military Law Academy seduced me by the fact that I didn't have to take exams in mathematics, which I thoroughly forgot during the war, and especially after being wounded in the head. And I went in February 1950 to Moscow for exams.

I passed everything that was required by the program relatively successfully, although not without difficulties. At the meeting of the mandate commission at the headquarters of the Moscow Military District, consisting mainly of generals and colonels, he appeared in a new tunic, with all orders and medals. As soon as I reported that I was a candidate for the Academy of Law, the entire commission laughed at me: "such a combat officer - and not in

Frunze Academy!". To my argument that the combined arms academy does not provide a civilian specialty, one general even began to tease: "Let's go to the veterinary then! All the same, you will change your commander's shoulder straps to narrow ones (then doctors, veterinarians and lawyers were supposed to wear narrow shoulder straps), but you will learn how to put enemas on mares, it will come in handy in civilian life!

And everyone began to persuade me to enter the Military Academy. Frunze, they say, we will credit you with the missing exam (in tactics and field regulations). I again showed perseverance, and then they told me: "You do not pass the competition." It can be seen that there were many candidates for the legal department, and

there was a shortage for the Frunzenskaya one. So, without salty slurping, I returned to my Oblique Mountain! But the decision, at all costs, to enter at least some military academy providing a civilian specialty, did not leave me, and, to the displeasure of the military commissar, I begged for a vacation and already in June went to Leningrad, where there were many academies

I immediately excluded the naval one (I couldn't swim), the artillery one too (a purely military specialty) and went to the Budyonny Academy of Communications. They refused me there, but advised me to apply to the Military Transport Department, where a new faculty was opening and there could be a

shortage. When the admissions committee began to ask me about the service, I realized that they were interested in something, and, not yet knowing which faculties they would recruit, I began to point out that I was from a family of hereditary railway workers, that both my grandfather and father, and my mother and my brothers worked on the railroad. And the then People's Commissar of Railways Kaganovich, whose name the academy I chose, actually helped me finish 10 classes. The war prevented me from entering the Novosibirsk Military Institute of Railway Transport Engineers, and now I hope for the fulfillment of this dream of mine by entering the Faculty of Railway Transport of the Academy.

My interlocutor interrupted such a passionate tirade with obvious regret, saying that the recruitment to the faculties related to the railway was completed, but there was still an opportunity to enter the engineering and automotive department. Where did my railway patriotism go! I immediately agreed, which, it seems, my interlocutor was also delighted. A few days later I, happy, with documents stating that

that he is enrolled as a student candidate and is obliged to appear by the deadline for passing the competitive entrance exams (bypassing the district preliminary exams), rushed to his

military registration and enlistment office.

My district military commissar, dissatisfied with the fact that I was only doing that I was driving around for exams, nevertheless had to let me go. And although here I had to take mathematics, and physics, and chemistry, and even everything that I handed over in Moscow, I decided. And I don't know what efforts I managed to master all this, but I was enrolled in the 1st year of the engineering and automotive faculty. You can imagine with what joy I said goodbye to this blast-furnace metallurgical Oblique Mountain of mine.

I have already said before that I was lucky to serve here, at the academy, under the command of the legendary General Alexander Georgievich Chernyakov. But five years at the academy brought me into contact with many more good people. I simply cannot remain silent about some of them, because they also left a good mark on me. This is, firstly, the head of our course, Lieutenant Colonel Tanasienko Nikolai Martynovich, young, in a special way smart not only externally, but also internally. Possessing a phenomenal memory and the ability to objectively evaluate all our actions, he was able to quickly rally the course and kept it all five years in an atmosphere of sincerity and truthfulness. I was soon appointed head boy of a course with more than a hundred students. My closest friends on the course were Lieutenant Colonel Shalapin Dmitry Ivanovich, who was elected secretary of the party bureau of the course, Major Bulavkin Sergei Alexandrovich, who was appointed commander of one of the five training departments, and Captain Vzyatyshev Nikolai Alexandrovich, who was elected secretary of the party organization of the educational department for all five years. We were also friends after the academy, until Major General Dmitry Shalapin died in a car accident, and Colonel Sergei Bulavkin, already in the

reserve, died suddenly of heart failure. We are still friends with Nikolai Vzyatyshev, for more than fifty years now. After graduation, he was left at the academy for a teaching job, where he became a doctor of technical sciences, a professor, a colonel, and now, already retired, continues to teach at the academy. in any of my

arrival in Leningrad, we meet with him and have long conversations about past times, about our classmates who have already gone to another world, and about the present, rather difficult times ...

I studied at the academy, like many others, with a certain amount of tension, but I also had enough time to participate in amateur art activities. We had an academic drama circle, or rather, a theater, in which one of the professionals who worked at the Lenfilm film studio was the director. So, I was also involved in this theater. I remember that at first they staged "The Russian Question" based on the play by Konstantin Simonov (I did not yet imagine that I would be personally acquainted with him), and then Korneichuk's "Platon Krechet", and here I happened to play the chairman of the executive committee Berest. Rita was also busy - in the role of Valya's assistant. The performance was a success, they even performed with it in many palaces of culture in Leningrad. I graduated

from the Academy "with honors", with the rank of lieutenant colonel and had the right to choose the place of further service. Among these places there was one in the airborne troops, and I chose it because I wanted to test myself in parachute jumps, and besides, I found out that some time ago these troops were commanded by a legendary man, Colonel General A. V. Gorbатов, so beloved by us from the battles near Rogachev. This means that "Gorbатов's" traditions are still alive in these troops. Thus, I became the head of the auto service of the 8th Airborne Corps (VDK), whose divisions were stationed in Belarus and Lithuania. And I was also proud that the Hero of

the Soviet Union, Lieutenant General Margelov Vasily Filippovich, then took command of these

troops, as it turned out, a patriot of the Airborne Forces to the marrow of his bones, a follower of the command methods of his predecessor, Alexander Vasilyevich Gorbатов, the same legendary person who loved and nursed these troops. Then both veterans and young paratroopers deciphered the abbreviation of the Airborne Forces as "Uncle Vasya's Troops", lovingly naming their commander as such, putting into these words great filial respect for him, and some mental confusion before the greatness of his military talent. And legends about him

a lot came up.

I made my first parachute jumps at the headquarters of the 8th Airborne Forces in Polotsk, and then, after it was disbanded, I jumped already in the 105th Guards Airborne Vienna Red Banner Division, whose headquarters and several regiments were stationed in Kostroma. There I already held the position of deputy division commander for the technical part. There were many interesting traditions in the landing troops. But one of them, a special one, concerning only officers, was playing preference in airships (as it was customary to call aircraft with troops on board) during flights to the landing site, which lasted an hour or more. The navigator of the aircraft warned the players 15 minutes before the landing, and they had time to "paint the bullet". Well, in general,

here in the division, I had to get to know "Uncle Vasya" Margelov - and his cool character, and his sincerity.

I remember once he severely punished me for the fact that during my vacation the commander of one of the regiments, having decided to build better shelters for equipment by winter, broke all the old ones at the end of summer, but did not calculate the forces and means, and in the autumn the equipment remained open air. Having just returned from vacation, I was summoned to the regiment by Commander General Margelov, who had arrived with an inspection check. To my attempt to justify myself by the fact that I was on vacation and did not know at all about such a decision of the regiment commander, the general caustically remarked: "Did you get vacation pay? And then he added: "I'll also punish the regiment commander, but he's just a fool, and I like you, I need such paratroopers. Therefore, there is more demand from you. You will understand and, I am sure, you will do everything not to miss in the future." It was a severe

punishment, but on reflection, I came to the conclusion that and fair. I cannot

fail to mention my commander, General Simonov Mikhail Yegorovich. Before he was awarded this high rank, they unearthed somewhere that he was at the front, being just a foreman, commander of a musician platoon of one of the divisions, assigned himself the rank of either captain or major. The case was transferred to the Central Committee (without its decisions, then such titles were not awarded). The Committee of Party Control under the Central Committee of the CPSU dealt with similar matters,

which was headed by Matvey Fedorovich Shkiryatov. He learned the circumstances of those long-standing events in which the battalion, retreating under the onslaught of the enemy, was stopped by this foreman and led to the attack. And when he was seriously wounded, then in the hospital the wounded soldiers of this battalion called him their battalion commander, well, and there they decided, since the battalion commander, then either a major, or, in the worst case, a captain. So after being wounded, Mikhail Yegorovich left the hospital with a certificate of injury already as an officer. Then Shkiryatov remarked: "Many sometimes abandoned not only battalions and regiments, but this one - on the contrary. So, he justified his front-line rank. So be it." And they confirmed this to him retroactively, and awarded the rank of general.

And I, in my incomplete thirty-three years, received at that time the rank of colonel.

The character of General Simonov was complex. It was from him that I heard the following phrase: "The tenor is not commanded." Very figurative! Apparently, this was his professional (musician!) saying. He had a deputy "in combatant" Colonel Sorokin Mikhail Ivanovich, and something went wrong between them ... after all, the general was weaker in tactical matters and in military theory in general than Mikhail Ivanovich. And the divisional commander decided to get rid of the "rival" according to the principle: what kind of boss will tolerate a subordinate smarter than himself next to him. But I did not find a more reliable way than to put him forward for promotion. And as a result, division commander Simonov remained in the rank of major general, and Mikhail Ivanovich Sorokin eventually became an Army General, Deputy Minister of Defense of the USSR ... Soon, unexpected

changes took place in my service. On the occasion of a tumor of the thyroid gland, I underwent an operation, and I was declared unfit for further service in the paratroopers, which greatly upset and upset me. I fell in love with skydiving and made them with pleasure. According to the minimum standards, an airborne officer of my rank had to make at least three to five jumps a year, but I managed to do twenty to thirty in a variety of conditions, in winter and summer, day and night. The conclusion of the doctors was unconditional, and I decided to retire

altogether. I wrote a report, and he "on command" went to Moscow. General Margelov called me, who was then dismissed from the post of Commander of the Airborne Forces for some sins, did not agree to leave

troops and remained deputy commander. He regretted what had happened to me and advised me not to rush to dismissal, but having met my decisive answer that there was no desire to serve anywhere else except in the Airborne Forces, he signed

the report. This report went around for a long time through various authorities, but in the end, the final resolution of the then Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces, Marshal of the Soviet Union

A. A. Grechko appeared on it: "Young, he will still serve." That's how I ended up as the head of the auto service of the 38th army in the Carpathian region, whose headquarters was in Ivano-Frankivsk. On business, I had to visit a lot in Transcarpathia. Picturesque mountains, waterfalls, rich nature, original Hutsul architecture - all this pleased...

I well remember the commander of the army, Major General N. G. Shtykov, a bilious, angry man, who seemed to simply hate all his subordinates. At the next "dressings" (it seems that only his activity consisted of them) he switched to insults that degraded human dignity. I involuntarily recalled the commander of the Airborne Forces, General Margelov, our "Uncle Vasya."

Shtykov was soon replaced by General Ukhov. In contrast to his predecessor, he had a cheerful disposition. True, sometimes he got excited, broke into rude expressions, but quickly cooled down and said self-critically: "Well, how did I sneeze you? Don't be offended, it happens to me sometimes."

Under him, Colonel Georgy Vasilievich Sredin, a man of rare soul, who reminded me of my first company commander, junior political officer Tarasov, came to the post of Member of the Military Council of the Army. Georgy Vasilyevich had a penetrating mind, he always had his own opinion on all issues of military life. I remember that some

Moscow inspector from the Main Political Directorate of the Armed Forces came and began to remark to Colonel Sredin that there was little bright, visual agitation in military camps and cited the city park as an example, where this agitation was in abundance. Then Georgy Vasilyevich asked him in the presence of many officers what exactly in terms of its content he liked and remembered most of all, and he hesitated, said that he did not

remembered. Then Sredin directly said to this inspector: "But why this abundance of colorful slogans, if their content does not leave a trace in the soul and memory of a person?" And the Muscovite was embarrassed. That's how subtly he managed to put in his place an excessively zealous political worker, our new Member of the Military Council. Soon he was awarded the rank of general, then he confidently moved up the service and reached the position of deputy head of the Main Political Directorate of the Ministry of Defense.

Once I was called to Moscow and offered to go "for generals' stripes" to the Far Eastern Military District, to the Ussuri Military Automobile School, the head of which had just been awarded the rank of general. A year later, they were going to transfer him to the European part of the USSR, and I was offered an internship this year with him as a deputy, and then take this general position. The Far East, as the reader already knows, is my homeland, and I agreed without hesitation. The head of the school was Major

General, Hero of the Soviet Union Yaksargin Vasily Vladimirovich. Small in stature, puny, with a face stained with brilliant green and round bands of adhesive tape. It seemed that he really loved not so much to get sick as to be treated. Each of his working days began with a visit to the school medical unit. It was meticulous to the point of absurdity. The report of the officer on duty at the school, and even the officer did not accept any appeal to him, until he made a dozen comments about the fact that he put his foot in the wrong way, turned his socks to the wrong angle, put his hand on the headgear at the wrong height and the chest was wrong puffed out, etc., etc. Shortly after my

arrival, he went on vacation, having given me a ton of instructions about strengthening the prestige of the school and maintaining high levels of discipline and academic performance.

In the very first days of my duties as the head of the school, an emergency happened: one cadet went on an unauthorized absence and, while intoxicated, started a fight in the city, beating a young man almost half to death with a soldier's belt buckle at a bus stop. In order to stop such cases (which, by the way, had happened before), I decided to bring this hooligan to trial by a military tribunal, and he was sentenced to two years in a disciplinary battalion. When General Yaksargin returned from vacation, he gave me a scolding for the fact that I,

you see, I disgraced the school in front of the command of the district, in which for many years before my arrival there was not a single criminal record. And it turns out that I am to blame, and not the self-willed hooligan. I realized that the most terrible thing in all this is that I "took dirty linen out of the hut," although almost all the officers of the school approved of my decisive actions, which sobered up many unbridled

youths. However, Yaksargin reported to the authorities about my supposedly ill-considered actions and raised the question of the impossibility of my appointment to the post of head of the school. It was clear that in the district they listened to the opinion of the Hero-General. And less than a year later, Yaksargin was transferred to the post of head of the military department of the Kuban Agricultural Institute, and Colonel Pavlov was appointed head of the school, who, like me, had previously held the position of deputy commander of the airborne division for the technical part.

So my promotion to the generals did not take place. By nature, I am generally a kind person, but sharp and straightforward, when they are cunning, cheating, being taken for a fool or a klutz.

Soon the head of the political department of the school was also replaced. They became political worker Peter Veselkov. He was one of those who are called a demagogue and talker. He either began or ended almost any of his phrases with the words "on a party basis." He did not have any authority or respect in the school, even the cadets called him Petka behind his back. Nevertheless, he quickly moved to the political department of the district, and even received the rank of general. Well, how did someone move up the career ladder. But the service in Ussuriysk gave me some wonderful

meetings that enriched me both as an officer and as a person in general.

One of them is an unforgettable meeting with Konstantin Simonov, a famous Soviet prose writer and poet. And it

happened like this. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Great Victory, he came to the Far East and, having met on May 9, 1965 in Vladivostok, the next day he arrived in Ussuriysk to visit the famous monument to the Far Eastern partisans.

And this monument was located on the territory of our school, and on Victory Day from all over Ussuriysk, columns of young people with garlands of flowers and coniferous branches stretched to it. I happened to accompany Konstantin Mikhailovich among the garrison authorities.

It is difficult to describe this meeting with an outstanding person, especially the evening at the cadets' club, where he tirelessly read his front-line poems. And then gave autographs. Then all his books were stolen from the school library for this purpose. When, upon personal acquaintance with him, Margarita and I managed to tell him that not far from the city there is an amazing place tomb of Vitaly Bonivur, an eighteen-year-old youth who died at the hands of the Japanese invaders, Konstantin Mikhailovich asked to accompany him to this historical place the next day. The road is not far, but our guest managed to ask me about my war

years, became very interested in our history with Rita penal battalion and promised us his friendship. And he was true to his word - we corresponded with him for a long time, and even years later he helped us find our named daughter, the Vietnamese young heroine Ho Thi Thu (I will tell about this story, which began five years after my meeting with Simonov, later). After visiting the Far East, Konstantin Mikhailovich published a small, but very memorable book for us, "Declaration of Love", in which he

sincerely confessed his love for the Far East, which was interesting both in its history and in its nature, and in particular to Ussuriysk, and we took part of these confessions

and on myself personally - such a great charm emanated from this man.

I cannot remain silent about people who deserve the kindest epithets addressed to them.

Then the Commander of the 5th Army, whose headquarters was in Ussuriysk, was General Petrov Vasily Ivanovich. Since I quite often had to meet with him in my service, invite him to various celebrations at the school, I will tell you about my impressions of these meetings. I admired his accessibility, somehow unusually combined

with his inaccessibility - so high he stood above all his ability to convince and involuntarily emerging faith in the justice and indisputability of his judgments.

Soon he became chief of staff, and then commander of the Far Eastern Military District, from there he was appointed First Deputy Minister of Defense and became Marshal

Soviet Union. For me, he was then more authoritative than the then Minister of Defense, Marshal S. L. Sokolov. Another legend of the Far

Eastern Military District was its commander, Hero of the Soviet Union, Colonel General, who later became Marshal of the Armored Forces, Oleg Aleksandrovich Losik. A wise, responsible military leader, self-possessed, who did not like to arrange "dressing down" on various occasions. He had a phenomenal memory and remembered the characteristics of all more or less large rivers, roads and mountain passes both in his district and on the territory of neighboring states (China, Korea). He conducted the operational-command gatherings of generals and senior officers of the district in such a sensible and organized way that, having visited them, everyone felt that he was becoming the owner of both new knowledge of the tactical situation and the ability to organize any command exercises using the example of these gatherings. In private conversations and conversations with subordinates, he was gentle, courteous, pleasant. Rarely have I seen such

warlords...

After more than four years of service in my native Far East, the Moscow leadership, which sent me there for generals' stripes, so to speak, "for growth", decided to return me to the European part of the USSR, and I was assigned to the Kharkov Road Institute, which gained world fame also because it included a laboratory where high-speed cars "HADI" were designed, which set more than one world speed record. The well-known racer and designer Vladimir Nikitin, a repeated champion of the USSR and the world, led this laboratory. Leading a military department in a civilian university is a new, unusual thing for me, and many who already had experience working in such conditions advised me something, warned me

against something, even frightened me with something. Yes, and they reproached him for why, they say, he agreed to go to a smoky, dusty city without a decent river and practically without greenery. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that the city is very green, and there is no more smoke in it than in other industrial cities, and there were four rivers, although small. Even more

pleasant was the meeting with the leadership of the institute.

The department had to be created from scratch. No premises, no equipment, no personnel. And if for a start I had already been assigned teaching officers from the Kharkov Guards Tank School, then all other issues had to be resolved with the leadership of the university. The rector Boris Vladimirovich Reshetnikov turned out to be exceptionally attentive and caring, with whom we created the department and its educational and material base. The heads of the departments, well-known professors Nikolai Yakovlevich Govorushchenko and Andrey Borisovich Gredeskul, the dean of the automotive faculty Valentin Georgievich Terletsky, provided great assistance, and later on, close cooperation was organized by the heads of the departments. We also formed close contact with the Komsomol organization of the institute and its secretary, Anatoly Turenko, a recent excellent student. Starting, as I said, "from scratch" in September 1968, already in mid-January 1969, we conducted full-blooded planned classes with students.

All the time while the institute was headed by B. V. Reshetnikov and Ivan Makarovich Grushko, who later replaced him, and then the same Komsomol leader Anatoly Nikolayevich Turenko, who later served as dean and vice-rector, we had complete mutual understanding and mutual support, especially in strengthening discipline. It was not for nothing that they sometimes said: "either a military department at an institute, or an institute at a military department." Indeed, the authority of the military department, its influence on many aspects of the institute's life was significant. It is no coincidence that this department has been recognized as the best among all the military departments of Ukraine for the military patriotic education of youth for more than one year. In 1981, the institute built a modern academic building for

the department, but it's a pity, by that time I had to leave the reserve due to illness. Yes, and the age was already approaching the maximum allowable for the personnel service. And for more than ten years after my dismissal, at the request of the rectors, I remained at the institute in a non-staff position of a referent-assistant to the rector. And I am grateful to these people for their trust. For thirteen years of leadership of the department and ten years of work in the rector's

office, a lot of events have happened. I'll stick with one of

them.

In the summer of 1970, Margarita Sergeevna and I spent our holidays on the Black Sea, in Gurzuf. Our sons, Sergei - after serving in the army, and Sasha - being a student of the university faculty, worked at that time in the pioneer camp "Artek" as pioneer educators. And then one day one of his sons ran to Gurzuf and gave us, as former front-line soldiers, an invitation from the leadership of Artek to a rally of pioneers from countries fighting for independence.

We were sitting in the front row together with other honored guests of this gathering, and children of different nations - pioneers of Cuba, African countries - came out onto the stage one by one and told about their struggle ... Children from Vietnam, which was at war at that time, were especially warmly welcomed. This delegation included two boys of fourteen and one girl of twelve or thirteen. All of them were in military uniform, with orders and medals and with red pioneer ties. Their leader (translator) told what heroic deeds in the fight against the American aggressors behind these children, especially a small, fragile girl named Thu, that the leader of the Vietnamese people "Uncle Ho" (Ho Chi Minh), holding a gathering of children -partisan, personally spoke with this girl and presented her with an award. During this story, the girl suddenly jumped off the stage and with the words "Ma", "Ma" rushed to Margarita Sergeevna, hugged her and burst into tears. The scenario of the celebration was broken.

It turned out that the word "ma" in Vietnamese means "mother". This girl's parents were killed by the Americans, and she saw in Margarita's eyes the same warmth and concern that she remembered in her

mother's eyes. That's how this little Vietnamese heroine called a Russian woman her Mom. Thus we became her named parents, and our sons became her brothers. She was with us for a whole week. We wanted to take care of Thu's official adoption right away, but the head of the delegation told us that he should coordinate this problem with the Vietnamese representation in Moscow, and Thu herself said that she was glad about this proposal, but would not be able to accept it. As long as the American aggressors trample on its soil, it will do everything in its power to help defeat them.

Soon they left, and Thu ended her last letter to us with the words: "I will write letters to you, but there will be no letters only if

I will die." And she signed: "Your daughter, Ho Thi Thu-Pyltsyna."

For a long time and without success, through various governmental, diplomatic and international organizations, we tried to find out at least something about her, but in vain. Even our Great Citizen and Man Konstantin Simonov, at our request, joined this search when he visited Vietnam in the winter of 1970. But then he also failed. He wrote us a long letter with advice on this unusual case and sent his "Vietnamese notebook" - a book of poems "Vietnam. Winter of the seventies" with the lyric poem "There is no other person's grief" as a gift to the named mother with the author's autograph.

This search lasted for 15 years. Vietnam has already defeated and expelled the aggressors, the North and South of this heroic country have already united. We did not miss a single TV show from Vietnam in the incredible hope of suddenly seeing our girl on the screen someday. But in vain. And then we decided to write to the Soviet TV correspondent in Vietnam, Sergei Alekseev, and ask him to try to find out at least something about the Vietnamese heroine Ho Thi Thu. And a miracle happened! At the end

of 1984, he and his friend, Komsomolskaya Pravda correspondent Sergei Shcherbakov, managed to find Thu by publishing our letter and Artek's photographs in Vietnamese newspapers. It turns out that when our Thu had

already become a squad leader, during one of the cruel American bombings, an explosion covered the trench in which Thu was with her soldiers. The comrades-in-arms managed to dig up only Thu, alive, but seriously shell-shocked, with almost no signs of life. For almost two years, she, who lost her memory, hearing and speech, was treated in the hospital and cured! However, remembering that somewhere in the USSR she had "Russian parents", she could

not remember either their names or addresses. And so Sergei

Alekseev and Sergei Shcherbakov filmed the story and told us when it would go on the Central Television of the USSR. Our joy on this occasion is difficult to describe. Soon a letter came from Thu, in which she also reported on this event and added that she was also happy because she was included in the Vietnamese youth delegation to the Moscow World Festival

youth and students, which should take place in the summer of 1985, so that she could meet her "Russian parents" after so many years of separation. And we, her named mother and father, were invited by the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young

Communist League as honorary guests of the festival. And this meeting

took place! Almost all the mainstream press wrote about her. A few months before these events, Komsomolskaya Pravda published a long essay by Inna Rudenko about our family, "Military Field Romance", which I quoted so much in some previous chapters. Acquaintance with this charming and honest journalist, I also consider a great milestone in our lives. And now, so many years later and already more than six years after the death of the main character of her "Military Field Novel", we keep in touch, however, only epistolary. And all the publications of that time, numerous documents, letters and photographs were included in my collection "There is neither subtract nor add" (Kharkov, HADI,

2000), published after the death of Margarita Sergeevna... In 1987, at the invitation of the government of Vietnam, we visited the homeland of Thu, visited many cities and memorable places of this amazing proud country associated with its history and the heroic struggle against American aggression.

And a year after our trip to the country of the named daughter, on the initiative of Sergei Alekseev, a teleconference "Moscow-Hanoi" was held, arranged by the television of the USSR and Vietnam, to which our entire family with grandchildren was invited to Central Television, and to Hanoi - all Thu family. (And now I sometimes watch a video recording of this teleconference, on which we had the good fortune to meet our beloved composer Alexandra Nikolaevna Pakhmutova, her husband, poet Nikolai Nikolaevich Dobronravov, poetess Rimma Kazakova.) And after this teleconference, the Soviet government and the Komsomol Central Committee invited Thu with husband and two children to visit the Soviet Union, get to know Moscow, get to know the named Soviet parents better and stay with us in Kharkov for a week. We still maintain an active correspondence with our Vietnamese friends. Very memorable in connection with these events were our meetings with

the then chairman of the Society of the Soviet-Vietnamese

friendship, Hero of the Soviet Union, Soviet cosmonaut No. 2, Colonel-General of Aviation German Stepanovich Titov, who invited our Soviet-Vietnamese family to his place. After personal communication, German Stepanovich left a very pleasant impression as a caring, sincere and deeply noble person. It was so easy to talk with him, his soul and heart seemed to be wide open, his eyes shone with kindness and participation. This meeting remained with me for the rest of my life, and the unexpected, untimely death of German Stepanovich came with great pain. I also think that I was very lucky when, at the end of March 1983, another

cosmonaut, twice Hero of the Soviet Union, Georgy Mikhailovich Grechko, came to us at HADI. Incredibly sociable, with a good sense of humor, deeply erudite not only in matters of astronautics. His speech to a team of teachers and students of the institute was so interesting, exciting and impressive that I am sure that everyone who was lucky enough to be present at this meeting will not forget it until the end of their days. I will cite here only two of his phrases confirming what has been said. He told how once, while returning by plane from some distant city of the USSR to Moscow, a young man approached him and, handing him a photograph of Grechko himself, asked for an autograph. And Georgy Mikhailovich signed this photo like this: "Vladimir (name) in memory of the joint flight. USSR Pilot-Cosmonaut Twice Hero of the Soviet Union G. Grechko." I can imagine what was going on in the soul of this young man from such an unexpected and very witty autograph!

And to one of the student's questions, "Here you, cosmonauts, probably can't even drink anything other than tea or juices?" Georgy Mikhailovich immediately answered: "If something is absolutely impossible, but you really want it,

then you can!" In general, my life, as well as the life of many who lived it actively, turned out to be rich in meetings with extraordinary people, each of whom left his mark on the soul, each planted a good seed in the heart, and to this day it sprouts kindness, respect for people, high demands on oneself and on those who are somehow close either at work, or in the neighborhood, or in a casual conversation, and intolerance of lies, dishonesty, rudeness.

The victory in the Great War was the most important event of the 20th century that has already gone down in history. But the 20th century also brought us an incredibly destructive event - the collapse of the once powerful state, the great Soviet Union, that of our united Motherland, which was able to overcome the overgrown tumor on the body of mankind - Hitler's fascism in a difficult war. The states that arose on the

ruins of the USSR with economic, cultural, and simply human ties torn to the core have lost their former power and perspective. During the time of so-called independence, we have not moved a single step towards it. The people in the bulk are ruined and crushed. We have received nothing but corruption, rabid nationalism, self-doubt and even disbelief in them, alcoholism and the porn industry, deliberately promoted and implanted, leading to further moral decay, and ultimately to the degradation of society. Instead of the friendly interdependence of the family of the Soviet Socialist Republics, a real dependence appeared - both economic and financial, and,

ultimately, political, but now on the US world gendarme, on all kinds of foreign exchange funds and banks of international imperialism. And the generation that won the Great Victory and in a short time restored the national economy destroyed by the war, this generation has now turned out to be the most oppressed.

What an attack on the youth! The history of the Great Patriotic War and socialist conquests is emasculated in school textbooks, the younger generation grows up not remembering the heroic past of its people, its true history. But after all, the truth is well known: "Whoever shoots the past with a pistol, the future will shoot with a cannon."

During the years of the "formation of democracy", when our heroic history was scolded with might and main, and even now sometimes "discoveries" are heard, as if our people had gone down in history along with

In the 20th century, the Patriotic War was unjust, and the "real truth" about it can, you see, be told when all its participants have passed away. Of course, then it will be easier to lie, because there will be no one to refute this lie.

But they, these "oracles", are mistaken. We are still alive, and many of us, perhaps, live long enough to prevent pseudo-historians from distorting the truth beyond recognition. Our children and grandchildren are alive, and not all of them succumbed to the anti-historical propaganda of many modern media, not all of them became fans of business at the expense of the disadvantaged. The well-known Kharkov poet, one of the last winners of the USSR State Prize, Boris

Chichibabin, summing up his reflections on the shameful collapse of the Soviet Union, wrote:

Silent from present disasters and fleeing
from future battles, who will be
responsible for his age? But there has to
be someone! Instead of conclusion
With this, dear readers, I
conclude my confession and before
you, and in front of your peers, and in front of our descendants.

For some reason, the role and significance of officer penal battalions in the war were either not disclosed at all, or conjectures and legends were composed around them, sometimes from half-truths, and sometimes from outright lies. And about the penal officers themselves, the opinion dominated that the machine of the then repressions emasculated their souls, turned them into outcasts, doomed to an inglorious death, people going into battle only under the muzzle of machine guns of detachments. My main desire was to convince the readers that these were, for the most part, soldiers who had not lost the concept of officer honor, who understood that in these extreme conditions they remained Soviet officers. Let me quote poetry too often, but this quatrain from the poem by the Kharkov poet Valery Bolotov, dedicated to Soviet officers, in my opinion, directly applies to the fighters of officer penal battalions: When

fascist chimeras crawled, To humiliate, trample my Motherland, Soviet officers stood up,
We got up to become a concrete block. I, who went through my part of the war as a platoon
and company commander in an officer penal battalion, had a chance to see him, so to speak,
from the inside, and by virtue of

my skills I tried to honestly tell you about it.

And not

I, and you, judge how much this my actually documentary story, my ingenuous story about the lived and experienced touched your souls and hearts, opened little-known pages of the past war for you. I am proud that I walked in a single

ranks, and I am happy that I belong to the generation of Soviet people who, at the cost of their blood and life itself, defended our great Motherland and almost in single combat defeated the plague of the 20th century, Hitler's fascism. Our motto then was: "I serve the Soviet Union!" I believe that even if not we, but our descendants will live to that happy time when with the same pride they will serve, if not the Soviet, then maybe the Slavic Union.